SIXTEEN SERMONS ON Different Subjects;

Most of them preached before the

UNIVERSITY of *Oxford.*

By SAMUEL ECCLES, *M. A.*
Of Brazen Nose College.

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A

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SERMON

SERMON I.

The Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity, illustrated and defended.

1 JOHN V. 7.

For there are three that bear Record in Heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one.

I Never yet could discover the Cause, why Men should so warmly defend any of the Antitrinitarian, (either Deistical, Socinian, or Arian) Heresies, against the clear Light and manifest Authority of the Scriptures; nor can I conceive, what great Advantage it would be to them, could they support their erroneous and dangerous Principles, with Arguments

SERM. I.

SERM. I. more cogent and conclusive than any they have hitherto been able to produce. Scripture has directed to worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, as clearly as 'tis possible for Words to express; and God himself has wonderfully condescended to reveal as much of his own *incomprehensible* Nature as it was agreeable to him we should know, or in short, convenient, necessary, or *possible* for us to understand. But vain Man! generally most ignorant of what he is most assured, chooses rather to dispute the Being of his God, than modestly to confess, he cannot find him out to Perfection.

As for Deism, I scarce need to trouble you with any Thing against it, it carries its own Confutation along with it: The absolute Necessity of a Mediator is no less apparent, in order to ransom us from Death, and recover our forfeited Title to Happiness, to render our imperfect Services somewhat acceptable, and particularly to attone for our manifold Sins and Transgressions, than Omnipotence itself, in the Creation and Preservation of this World.

How

How compleat the Perfection of the rest of the Creation was, before the Fall of Man, and the Curse consequent thereupon, we cannot absolutely determine; but no Doubt there was more Harmony and Concord, more Beauty and Regularity, than at present appears: And even yet, in many Instances, we may find Providence is more indulgent to the inferio Class of Beings, than to that which w designed the Master of the Creation. Man comes into the World helpless and defenceless, and is long exposed to more and greater Difficulties than he himself is capable of surmounting. When Reason begins to dawn, great is the Necessity of good and early Instruction, lest the Passions prevail, and extinguish the Light of it; or if they are happily awed, and carefully kept under, Vanity or Pride, term it which you please, frequently breaks in upon it, painting many Things in deceitful Colours; magnifying some, diminishing others, and overshadowing more; at the same Time holding up a false Mirror, through which *deluded* Man fancies he sees and discerns all Things clearly and distinctly as they are.

SERM. I. That boasted Prerogative of human Nature, Reason, when attended with this Foible Vanity, too constant an Attendant of it, has lead many into such Errors, and filled them with such vain Conceit, as the Voice of the Charmer is not able to extricate them out of or remove, charm he never so wisely. This is the Misfortune of the *opinionated* Deist: In his own *infallible* Judgment he has found out a Method to reconcile infinite Justice and Purity, with rebellious Insolence, and wilful Pollution; to prescribe infinite Power within finite Prescription, and to comprehend infinite Wisdom with infinite Understanding: He presumptuously pretends to that Knowledge the Angels themselves dare not aspire to, and to be thoroughly acquainted with those Mysteries, they but humbly petition to look into. In short, he has said in effect, to Omnipotence, what Omnipotence most reasonably said to the proud Waves, the Operations of his Hands, *Hitherto shalt thou pass, and no further.* Whilst he continues thus blind to all revealed Truths, it will be but vain and fruitless to endeavour to draw the Veil from before his Eyes; all that can be

be done, is to pray, that God would be ſo indulgent to him as once more to make him an Offer of that Grace, he has ſo fooliſhly and ungenerouſly rejected, which can only work the Cure, before Conviction does but ſerve to add Weight to Condemnation.

SERM. I.

As to the Abettors of the Antitrinitarian Hereſies, whether Arian or Socinian, or any other Sect, as there have been, and are many ſtill, all equally abſurd and wicked, as I before hinted, I cannot ſee of what Advantage it could poſſibly be to them, could they maintain their deſtructive Principles with more Reaſon than hitherto they have been able to advance.

The Tenets of both *Arius* and *Socinus* are too well known to need repeating in this Place; but as I ſhall make it my Buſineſs in one Part of this Diſcourſe to make ſome Reply to them, I hope it may, in ſome Meaſure, excuſe for me in that I am going to repeat to you what you already know. If I can produce nothing new, as their Adherents ſtill continue to repeat, with little Variations, the old Objections, ſure it may be allowable to return

SERM. I. upon them the yet *unanſwered* Replies with no fewer Alterations.

And firſt, then, *Arius* impiouſly affirmed there was a Time, when the Son was not; that he was a Creature, and made out of nothing; mutable in his Nature, and, like the Angels, liable to Sin; that being united to human Fleſh, he ſupplied the Place of the human Soul, and was conſequently ſubject to Sufferings and Pain. Thus far the blind Apoſtate *Arius*.

Fauſtus Socinus, not more orthodox than his Forerunner, maintained, that the Supreme Deity is perſonally but one; that our bleſſed Saviour is not God over all; that he had no Exiſtence before his Birth of the Virgin *Mary*; that whatever is ſaid of his Merit and Satisfaction for Sin, and Redemption of Sinners, is certainly to be underſtood in a metaphorical Senſe; and that the Holy Ghoſt is no more than a Divine Influence, without any perſonal Exiſtence at all.

Here, I hope, we may ſay the Ax is laid to the Root of the Tree; and if this Stroke cannot be averted, Chriſtianity muſt fall, and Religion be no more.

How

How unreaſonable may we ſay, thoſe People are, who cenſure our Church for making uſe of Creeds, where this Doctrine, and all other derogatory of the Truth and Dignity of the three Perſons in the Holy Trinity, is anathematized! May we not juſtly conclude, they give us but too much Reaſon to ſuſpect the Soundneſs of their Faith? For, if they do not condemn the Hereſy, we cannot pronounce them clear of the Infection. Such ſhocking Declarations as theſe call aloud for open and univerſal Condemnation, and every one that has any Belief in Our Saviour's own Words, — *Whoſoever ſhall deny me before Men, him will I alſo deny before my Father which is in Heaven*, ſhould be zealous to atteſt and demonſtrate his Abhorrence of ſuch damnable Doctrine. Tho' theſe monſtrous Opinions have long ſince been ſufficiently anſwer'd and confuted, yet as they are again repeated, and inveloped in Obſcurity, I once more ſay, that muſt be my Apology for the following Reply.

And firſt, this by the Way; when once Men deviate from the Paths of Truth, they ſeldom can agree to keep

SERM. I. Company long together; whatever Motives led them aſide, or whatever Temptations allured them out of the common Path, you ſoon find them ſeparate; one Party concluding within themſelves, at leaſt, they have diſcovered a ſafer or nearer Road; and it rarely happens that any of them have ever that commendable Aſſurance to return back into the right Way; rather ſuffering themſelves to be loſt and bewildered in the crooked and dark Mazes of Error and Obſtinacy, than modeſtly own their Miſtake, or acknowledge the Poſſibility of their having erred or been miſled. In like Manner may you find all Sects of Antitrinitarians, diſagree among themſelves, though all of them unanimous in Oppoſition to the true orthodox Doctrine of the Trinity, equally determined not to be convinced, however ſtrongly confuted.

Arius, one of the Preſbyters of *Alexandria*, merely in Oppoſition to *Achillas*, Biſhop of that See, to which he thought he had as juſt Pretenſions, and was ſlighted in the Choice, publiſhes the forementioned Doctrine, viz. That there was a Time when the Son was not, without

any

any Limitation: But you find *Socinus* fixes preciſely, and determines he had no Exiſtence before his Birth of the Virgin *Mary*. *Arius* was rather more cautious when he ventured out of the right Way; but *Socinus*, after he had followed him a little, would ſtill puſh on: The former had not loſt all Sight of the Goſpel, the latter had cloſed his Eyes againſt it. For though this ſmall Difference may at the firſt Sight appear trifling, yet a little Enquiry will demonſtrate it conſiderable.

SERM. I.

Arius would fix upon no Time, when our Saviour ſhould begin to exiſt, knowing he could not then ſo eaſily ſhift his Ground, and defend himſelf; *Socinus*, heated with a vain Imagination of his own Abilities, peremptorily determines it, and thereby has manifeſted the Error of both, and his own Ignorance in particular. Had he remembered that remarkable Conference between the unbelieving, captious Jews, and Our Saviour, he certainly would have been a little more wary; for 'tis expreſs againſt him: I ſhall only repeat what immediately concerns us, without reciting the Paſſage at length. *Then ſaid the Jews unto him, thou art not yet fifty Years*

SERM. I. *Years old, and hast thou seen* Abraham? *Jesus said unto them, verily, verily, I say unto you, before* Abraham *was, I am.* Had *Socinus* been amongst the Jews when our Saviour made this Reply, who, that reads this Assertion of his, can deny but he would have taken up Stones with them to have cast at him; and believe me, I must think they were at that Time much more excusable for that Action, than he for this Declaration.

But let us return again to our Evidences, and examine their Depositions: Upon Cross-Examination, I think, we shall be able to detect them in various Contradictions, and that, in other Cases, has been accounted and allowed sufficient to render the Credit and Testimony of a Witness, invalid. *Arius* affirms, our Saviour was a Creature made of nothing, mutable in his Nature, and, like the Angels, liable to Sin. —— *Socinus* says, whatever is said of our Saviour's Merit, and Satisfaction for Sin, and Redemption for Sinners, is certainly to be understood in a metaphorical Sense. Here you are to observe, *Arius* artfully passes over the mediatorial Office of Our Saviour in Silence, very well know-

knowing, oppoſing that, was to deny the Neceſſity of a Mediator; and Sin had not then ſo far led him Captive, as to believe Mankind could ſtand before the Throne of Judgment without an Advocate.

When *Socinus* perceived what the other had advanced wanted not its Votaries, he was ſenſible no created Being could poſſibly attone for the Sins of another, much leſs for the Sins of the whole World; wherefore, out of his abundant Wiſdom, he has told us, all that is ſaid of our Bleſſed Saviour's Merit, is to be underſtood in a metaphorical Senſe. Strange Depoſition this.——And will a metaphorical Saviour ſtand him or us in any Stead? Our Sins are numerous and glaring, and call aloud for Juſtice; will a metaphorical Plea ſatisfy and appeaſe it? If Our Saviour's Merit, Satisfaction for Sin, and Redemption for Sinners, is thus to be argued away, the moſt comfortable and deſirable Part of the Scriptures may ſtand as dead Letters; and, in ſhort, all the Epiſtles and Writings of the *Orthodox Primitive Chriſtians* be deemed only a Rhapſody of Nonſenſe: No Regard needs to be paid to Our Saviour's expreſs Injunction, *Go ye, and teach*

(or

SERM. I. (or disciple) *all Nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost*; for here we are taught they are Words only, without any Signification.

What Sense can we possibly make of Our Saviour's Address to the Father, if these Men's Doctrine must stand? Or must they be credited sooner than the Beloved Disciple? *I have finished*, says Christ, *the Work which thou gavest me to do; and now, O Father, glorify me with thine own self, with the Glory which I had with thee before the World was.* And was he what they have blasphemously asserted, a Created Being, what must we account of St. *Paul*, that great Apostle, who plainly tells us, *That Jesus Christ thought it no Robbery to be equal with God.* He tells us in another Place, *That he was ordained a Preacher, and an Apostle, that he spoke the Truth in Christ, and lyed not*, and says, *there is one God, one Mediator between God and Men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a Ransom for all:* But if you believe *Socinus*, and his Followers, that Christ's Sufferings and Death were no Way meritorious, what has St. *Paul* been doing,

doing, but, to use his own Phrase, *Beating the Air?*

Had these worthless Men spoke fairly out at first, what they have, in effect, by little and little at length declared, that Jesus Christ himself was an Impostor; that the Revelation of both Old and New Testament is an Human Imposition, that God never made any, nor Man stood in Need of one; that let us be ever so wicked or rebellious, a bare Recantation is sufficient, or if suddenly taken off in the Height of our Iniquity, infinite Justice must acquit us; for we can no Way disqualify ourselves for the Title of infinite and endless Happiness: I say, had they made this open Declaration, they had saved the World much Pains, and, I verily believe, done much less Mischef.

However, let them make as light as they will of Our Saviour and his Apostles, they must allow, at least, that they were true Prophets: They foretold such Men should flourish, and Our Saviour says, If it were possible, they should deceive the very Elect. St. *Peter* observes, likewise, that there shall come Scoffers, walking after their own Lusts; that there should

arise

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arise false Teachers, who privily shall bring in damnable Heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift Destruction: And then he adds, many shall follow their pernicious Ways, by Reason of whom the Way of Truth shall be evil spoken of.

We shall undoubtedly never be blam'd for not comprehending incomprehensible Truths, and as certainly become answerable for denying them. But *Socinus* peremptorily asserts the Supreme Deity, in Contradiction to all Revelation, is *personally* but One; and accordingly makes the Holy Ghost no more than a Divine Influence, without any personal Existence at all. And must this Man's Word prevail against his Authority, to whom all the Prophets gave Witness? I am almost afraid to repeat Our Saviour's own Words, lest I should be thought to pronounce Sentence against him.

Wherefore, I say unto you, all Manner of Sin and Blasphemy shall be forgiven unto Men; but the Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto Men. And whosoever speaketh a Word against

againſt the Son of Man, it ſhall be forgiven him; but whoſoever ſpeaketh againſt the Holy Ghoſt, it ſhall not be forgiven him neither in this World, neither in the World to come. But, perhaps, he would tells us, this, likewiſe, is to be underſtood in a metaphorical Senſe. Alas! ſuch Pleading, ſuch Equivocation, will never avail at that Bar where we muſt all receive the irrevocable Sentence.

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Having thus curſorily run over ſome of the Depoſitions of theſe two grand Apoſtates, who want not now their Followers and Votaries, and ſhewn the Contrariety manifeſt in their Verdicts, let us diſmiſs them as very exceptionable Evidences, and ſee whether their preſent Advocates are not as liable to be diſcredited, who have little more to defend themſelves by than the former Arguments new modell'd, and ſometimes more impiouſly aſſerted and advanced.

Their Followers are too numerous to be mentioned, much more their Abſurdities too many to be recited; it ſhall therefore ſuffice only to ſingle out ſome of the moſt important, which if undeniably made manifeſt, may be ſufficient to expoſe all the reſt.

The

SERM. I.

The first Objection against the commonly received Doctrine of the Trinity by them made, and of which I shall take Notice, is, that however clear it may be to Men of Judgment and Learning, yet to Christians in general it cannot be so. And Clearness and Perspicuity in fundamental Doctrines, of which this must be confessed one, is generally allowed on, and confessed by all Hands.

Here I shall not take the Advantage of them, for allowing that to be in any wise clear to Some, which they have in many Places affirmed to be absolutely dark and obscure to All; but rather endeavour to demonstrate it to be no less so to the Unlearned than Learned. If they mean by the Word clear, comprehensible, I deny the Objection, as to either; but if they only understand by it, not inconsistent, or contradictory inconclusive, then, I say, 'tis equally apparent to both.

Mysteries would undoubtedly never have been revealed, unless they were designed to be enquired into; but then, as they are Mysteries, that should be sufficient to admonish us, such Inquiries should always be attended with Reverence,

rence, and profound Humility: Where- SERM. I.
fore it may and often does happen, where the Unlearned is ſatisfied and content with a general Account, that his Conception of a divinely revealed Truth is clearer than that of the more Learned, who will not reſt eaſy without diving for Conviction into Particulars.

One Inſtance to confirm this, is as good as a Thouſand; and therefore I ſhall not take up any more of your Time, than whilſt I inſtance in one. Many who have perplexed and confounded themſelves with the Succeſſion of Time, or paſt Duration, have at laſt concluded with an Idea of Eternity more imperfect and inadequate, than they have who were ſo far from ſearching ſo particularly, that they were unacquainted with the very Terms. The Reaſon is obvious; the Unlearned ſits down convinced with his firſt Notion of it, and enquires no further; whereas the other totally obſcures, it by heaping up Difficulties and mixing Ambiguities. Myſteries, as I obſerved, were revealed to be enquired into, and embraced, but not to be diſcovered or comprehended, for then they would ceaſe to

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be ſuch; neither are they the leſs important for being obſcure, as our Adverſaries would inſinuate, but ſometimes the more ſo upon that very Account: Wherefore, the Unlearned may receive and embrace them, and the Learned can do no more, unleſs too often by a preſumptuous Scrutiny, render them more myſterious. The Man that offers up his Prayers at the Plow or in his Cottage, undeniably confeſſes the Preſence of the Almighty every where; but if you ſend him to the Philoſopher to comprehend the Meaning of Ubiquity, 'tis more than probable he returns affirming or ſuſpecting it to be no where. In like Manner the common Chriſtian, and there are few but what can, who can anſwer in the Words of our moſt excellent Catechiſm, what he learns and is taught, in the Articles of his Belief, and remains ſatisfied within himſelf of the Truth and Certainty of it: Namely, that he hath learned Firſt, to believe in God the Father who hath made him, and all the World; Secondly, in God the Son, who hath redeemed him and all Mankind; Thirdly, in God the Holy Ghoſt, who ſanctifieth him, and all the

Elect

Elect People of God. I ſay, ſuch a One has a clearer and more diſtinct Notion of the Trinity, than he, who has puzzled and confounded himſelf with the Terms, Nature, Perſon, Eſſence, Subſtance, Subſiſtance, Coequality, Coeſſentiality, and the like; and, in ſhort, it is as much as either of them can underſtand, or either of them are required to believe.

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Since this is the Caſe, inſtead of arguing thus cloſely, whether a common Chriſtian can comprehend any Thing of this Myſtery, may we not rather conclude he has clearer and more perfect Ideas of thoſe Things, than he that preſumes to pry into them? To me, the Queſtion anſwers itſelf: So that inſtead of the Objection, that it is above the Capacity of the Unlearned to comprehend any Thing of the Trinity, being an Argument againſt the Importance of it, we perceive, it being no leſs plain and level to them than to the moſt Learned and Laborious, is rather a Proof and Confirmation of the Truth and Reality of it. I'll grant you, the One may be more regular and diſtinguiſhing in giving his Definitions, but the Other may be as firm and as orthodox in

SERM. I. the Faith. In ſhort, was this Objection to be allowed momentous, and of Conſequence, Chriſtianity and Caſuiſtry might be proved no leſs dependant on each other, and practical Deiſts and profeſſed Hereticks, Arians or Socinians, proved real Atheiſts, Numbers of them being as incapable to defend the Proof of the Being of a God againſt the Sophiſtry of the Age, as the moſt illiterate Chriſtian to ſupport the Doctrine of the Trinity.

Another Objection generally made, and by Unbelievers of every Denomination ſtrenuouſly maintained, is, that this Doctrine is contradictory to Common Senſe, and conſequently unreaſonable to be believed. One Thing we may ſafely venture to ſay, that there is no Objection has been brought by Unbelievers as yet againſt the Truth and Importance of this Doctrine, but what, upon Examination, will be found much more unreaſonable and abſurd.

For, Firſt, without Reaſon, and in Oppoſition to Revelation, one Part of the Socinians object againſt the Divinity of the Second and Third Perſons in the Trinity, affirming them to be Creatures, which as they allow Divine Honour to be

be due to Chriſt, proves them to be guilty of a groſſer Sort of Idolatry, than even the Heathens themſelves ever gave into. To join Creatures into one Holy Trinity with God, and to baptize Men into the Faith and Worſhip of Creatures, far ſurpaſſes all Pagan Theology, and inſtead of extricating themſelves out of any Difficulties, involves them ten-fold more faſt in Abſurdity and Contradiction.

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Secondly, Another Sort deny the Second and Third of the Trinity to be Perſons, and make them no more than the *Power* and *Wiſdom* of God, one call'd his Word, the other his Spirit; but yet, that they are nothing different from God: But into what Error and Confuſion muſt ſuch an Aſſertion neceſſarily and unavoidably lead them? Upon this Concluſion, they cannot ſtop at a Trinity in God, but muſt deify, if I may be allowed the Expreſſion, all his other Attributes, as his Juſtice, Mercy, Providence, Omnipotence, Eternity, Ubiquity, and many more, All equally upon their Principles entitled to Perſonality with thoſe Two they have ſo diſtinguiſhed; ſo that inſtead of the Three in Heaven, which they confeſs,

SERM. I. every Attribute must be acknowledged a God.

It would be needless and endless to enumerate all their Contradictions, and to shew you how they differ among themselves, if 'tis possible, even more than they do from us: One Sort of them making the Object of their Worship, a God; another, only a Creature: One, asserting Three Persons in the Trinity, another but One: This affirming them to be adorable, the other denying it: Thus one Part accusing the other of Idolatry in paying Adoration to a Creature, whilst that is condemned for Profaneness, and an erroneous Faith, in forbidding Divine Honour to whom it is due.

I shall therefore conclude with the Observation of the Learned Bishop *Bull* in his Discourse of the Doctrine of the Catholick Church for the first three Ages of Christianity, concerning the Blessed Trinity, considered in Opposition to Sabelleanism and Tritheism, wherein he says, that of such a Distinction and Union of Persons we have indeed no Example, or exact Similitude among created Beings: But what then? It does not follow, that therefore

therefore there cannot be ſuch a Diſtinction and Union in the tranſcendant and moſt ſpiritual Nature of God. The Antitrinitarians can never produce a demonſtrative Reaſon to prove that this cannot be; and Divine Revelation plainly aſſures us that ſo it is. Wherefore to the Holy, Bleſſed, and Glorious Trinity, three Perſons, and one God, let us aſcribe, as is moſt due, All Honour, Power, Praiſe, Might, Majeſty and Dominion, now and for evermore. *Amen.*

St. MARY'S,
Oxon.

SERMON II.

Self-Sufficiency reprov'd.

MATTHEW XIX. 22.

But when the young Man heard that Saying, he went away ſorrowful: For he had great Poſſeſſions.

THERE are few here, I dare ſay, but what are very well acquainted with the whole Story from whence the Words of my Text are taken; but whether it is ſo generally underſtood, is, what I think, may modeſtly enough be ſuſpected. SERM. II.

Before, then, we proceed any further upon this Diſcourſe, it may not altogether

SERM. II. ther be amiſs to examine into the Particulars, that is, the Queſtions of the young Man, and the Anſwers of our Saviour, a little more ſtrictly.

Here, then, let me firſt obſerve to you, that this young Man was convinced by the Soundneſs of the Doctrine, and the Account he had heard of the extraordinary Works of our Saviour, that he was ſome eminent Perſon; and deſirous of hearing ſome purer Precepts of Virtue and Piety, he comes and addreſſes himſelf, tho' at the ſame Time not a little pleaſed and elated with an Opinion of his own Uprightneſs. This, I ſay, is what you may eaſily gather from the Conference between them. His firſt Queſtion, indeed, is modeſt enough, tho' by our Saviour's Reply not altogether void of Compliment; *Good* Maſter, what good Thing ſhall I do, that I may have eternal Life? As our Bleſſed Saviour was ſenſible, whatever extraordinary Opinion the young Man had entertained of him, yet that he looked upon him only as Man, he, therefore, gently rebukes him for his Flattery or Compliment in calling him, Good Maſter, giving him to under-

ſtand

ſtand, that that Epithet properly, and only, belong'd to him who is the Author and Fountain of all Goodneſs. After this ſhort but neceſſary Admonition, he proceeds to anſwer him, by aſſuring him upon what Terms and Conditions Eternal Life is to be obtained; namely, upon his keeping the Commandments of God.

The young Man, either to have his Goodneſs applauded, or to make an Oſtentation of his Obſervance of the Law, as we may conclude from his Reply, proceeds to enquire, which of the Commandments; then our Saviour, with no leſs Reſpect than Condeſcenſion, ſatisfies his Curioſity by a Rehearſal of them: Thou ſhalt do no Murder; Thou ſhalt not commit Adultery; Thou ſhalt not ſteal; thou ſhalt not bear falſe witneſs; Honour thy Father and thy Mother; and thou ſhalt love thy Neighbour as thyſelf. Now, I ſay, from the young Man's Reply, Who is there that cannot eaſily perceive, he either expected to have been applauded by our Saviour, and to have been told there was nothing more for him to obſerve; or elſe that he was ambitious his Obſervance of the Law

ſhould

SERM. II. ſhould be made publick? *All theſe Things,* ſays he, *have I kept from my Youth up.*

Now then come we to the material Queſtion, and wherein ſeems to lie all the Rigidneſs of the Injunction, and from which Anſwer aroſe that Sorrow and Uneaſineſs mentioned in my Text. Hitherto all was right and well, and he ſeems to exult and rejoice; his favourite Paſſion was untouched, and upon theſe Terms, he could make ſure of Eternal Life. But alas! he is applying to one that was very well acquainted with his latent Foible, and knew as well that his Poſſeſſions had great Hold of him, as that he had great Poſſeſſions to part withal. *What lack I yet?* Jeſus *ſaid unto him, if thou wilt be perfect, go and ſell what thou haſt, and give to the Poor, and thou ſhalt have Treaſure in Heaven; and come and follow me.* As much as if he had ſaid, The neceſſary Duties which God hath made the indiſpenſable Conditions of Life, I told you before; but if that does not ſatisfy, and you aim at a greater Degree of Perfection, and will do ſomething excellent and extraordinary, then go, ſell all your Eſtate and give

give it to the Poor, and follow me thro' Afflictions, and Poverty; and laying aſide all worldly Affairs, apply yourſelf wholly to be a Preacher of the Goſpel; and you ſhall have an extraordinary Reward in Heaven.

It has been remark'd by an eminent Writer, that the young Man might have done well if he had gone away ſatisfied with Chriſt's firſt Anſwer. For, our Saviour, ſays he, does not ſeem to have bidden him ſell his Eſtate, as a Thing abſolutely neceſſary to his being a good Man; but only as a Thing neceſſary at that Time to his being a Preacher of the Goſpel; and that he might reprove his Confidence, and that he might have an Occaſion to repreſent to his Diſciples the great Danger and Miſchief of the inordinate Love of Riches.

To this Remark, let us ſee whether ſome other Obſervations may not juſtly be added. And firſt, I ſay, there is no Queſtion to be made but our Saviour was thoroughly acquainted with his avaricious Diſpoſition, as well as with his great Poſſeſſions, and that as he was ſeemingly ſo deſirous of attaining to Perfection,

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fection, it was but juſt that He who alone knew the Heart, and wherein he was defective, ſhould firſt ſet about to convince him of that Foible which occaſion'd it. Wherefore we may conclude, it was a particular Command to him, in order to manifeſt to him the Inſincerity of his pretended Love to Eternal Life, and not a Precept common to all Chriſtians. Upon this Account therefore, this Precept of ſelling all we have, can only take Place when any one is in the ſame Situation with the young Man in the Goſpel, *i. e.* When he has an expreſs Command from God ſo to do, or when he perceives his Riches are an Impediment to the ſecuring his Eternal Intereſt. In ſuch Caſes as theſe, we are not only commanded to part with our Abundance and ſell all, but even with the neareſt and dearest Things about us, if theſe by ſome are not accounted ſo.

Another Obſervation I ſhall now make to you, is this; you may remember when the young Man aſk'd, which of the Commandments he was to keep, in order to obtain Eternal Life; our bleſſed Saviour refers him to the Precepts of the ſecond

Table

Table only; not that they are of more Obligation than those of the first, or that by performing them alone we may attain Eternal Life: For we are elsewhere told, that the great Commandment of all, is, to love the Lord our God with all our Hearts: I say, he instances in those of the second, not only, because the Love of our Neighbour is an excellent Evidence of our Love to God; but because the Pharisees thought these Commandments of trivial Account, and easy Performance, and the young Man had made his Boast of having observed all these from his Youth up; therefore, by some of these it was that our Saviour intended, by and by, to convince this Inquirer, that he neither had, nor could keep them. For, alas! I think it is morally impossible for a Pharisaical avaricious Indisposition (of which Sect 'tis generally believ'd this Person was, and of which Temper he has demonstrated himself to have been) not to transgress the last Precept in the Decalogue, as for the Dropsical not to thirst.

Another Thing, not unworthy our Observation, is the mild and gentle Method

SERM. II. thod our Bleſſed Saviour took to rebuke this young Man's Confidence, and to convince him of his Error, without expoſing the one, or detecting the other. And, indeed, we may frequently find he ever had at Hand undeniable Anſwers to ſilence and confute the provoking or perplexing Queſtions of the Phariſees; but he never caſt any Ridicule upon the Queſtion, however weak or impertinent, or Satire or Invective on the Queriſt, however malicious or deſigning. 'Tis not to be doubted, but he could have as eaſily expos'd him for that daring and bold Aſſertion, *All theſe Commandments have I kept from my Youth up*, as, by the ſhort but pithy Injunction, he ſent him away penſive and ſorrowful. 'Twas no ſmall Preſumption to affirm he had been ſo ſtrict and conſtant an Obſerver of the Law; and I believe 'twould be no Falſity to ſay, that one of a leſs mild good-natur'd Diſpoſition than he to whom he aſſerted it, would not have fail'd curbing and correcting him for it. But we can read nothing of this, either in his Preſence or Abſence; no, not even when he was gone; and had convicted himſelf by his covetous

covetous tenacious Temper, and his ſorrowful Departure, to be a Tranſgreſſor of thoſe Laws he had juſt been boaſting ſo minutely and particularly to have obſerved. SERM. II.

I might bring many Inſtances more of this gentle and courteous Behaviour in our Bleſſed Saviour whenever attack'd by this all-ſufficient preſumptive Sect, but I would rather hope there are not many here but what are more converſant in thoſe Pages of Life, from whence I muſt collect them, than to ſtand in Need, that I ſhould trouble them with any more Examples of a parallel Kind: Wherefore, I ſhall now endeavour to find what uſeful Inferences may be deduced from this ſhort Conference tending to our own preſent Intereſt and Advantage, and ſo conclude.

And, firſt, from hence I would infer, we ought to be abundantly cautious how we indulge any favourite Paſſion; for when once that has got the Aſcendant over us, rather than not gratify it, we alſo ſhall go away penſive and ſorrowful. Let us be aſſured, likewiſe, that the Tempter whom we are to contend with, is not unacquainted with the Frame and

SERM. II.

Diſpoſition of our Minds, and, therefore, very well knows where, and when to lay his Baits, how to conceal the Snare he would entangle us in, and to adapt his Allurements to our Inclinations. He knows better than to offer to miſlead the Liberal and Generous with thoſe engaging Hopes of Gain and Profit; the Niggardly and Covetous, with the Temptation of Gaiety and Pleaſures; the Aſpiring and Ambitious, with the Allurements of Mirth and Jollity, or the Modeſt and Abſtemious, with Intemperance or Exceſs. No! He can allure the Liberal with a Profuſeneſs in a charitable Diſguiſe; he has Bags for the Covetous, Honour and Power for the Aſpiring and Ambitious; and, in ſhort, as many, and as various Inſinuations as Tempers to deal with. And, beſides, what is no leſs deplorable, he generally holds up ſo falſe a Mirrour before the Eyes of the Deluded, that it repreſents their Foible, be it what it will, as the only amiable Qualification. Bid the Profuſe to learn Frugality, and he ſhall go away as penſive as the Niggard when you command him to practiſe Charity.

Secondly,

Secondly, As most Men differ as much in Temper as in Complexion, and as the grand Seducer has so many various Wiles to ensnare them in, let it be the Care and Business of every one to endeavour to vanquish and subdue his natural Infirmity (if I may be allowed the Expression) with its opposite Virtue, as the surest Method of foiling his Enemy, and becoming entirely subject to no one particular Passion. Virtue in one particular, and one only that I know of, may be said to resemble Vice, *viz.* It may be acquir'd.

Our Dispositions are seldom so strong, but they will yield; or our Passions so predominant, but they may be resisted. Let a Person of a tenacious Temper strive to overpower it with Acts of Generosity, an extravagant one, resist it with OEconomy, and the Ambitious, with Humility and Condescension, and in Time, according to the Saying of the Prophet, *The Crooked shall be made straight, and the rough Way plain.*

The last Inference I shall now make is this, that from hence we should never learn to put any Confidence or Assurance in ourselves. The young Man, it is

SERM. II. plain, thought his Virtue to be ſpotleſs, and his Claim to everlaſting Life, indiſputable: He had not, it may be, been guilty of any enormous Sins, and, in ſome Caſes, might have been obſervant of the Law; but then, I am afraid it was in thoſe only where Obedience was more agreeable than Tranſgreſſion, and where Compliance was rather Profit than Expence, or Intereſt than Pain. As to any eminent Virtues we no where find him remarkable for them; and though it cannot be proved he was guilty of any great Evil, yet it may be affirmed he had done no great Good. This, I am afraid, is the Caſe of too many amongſt us, who think themſelves even with the World, and at Quits with Mankind, becauſe they have done them no Injury; Friends and Favourites of Heaven, and Heirs of everlaſting Life, becauſe they have not rebelled againſt it. But alas! they ſtand indebted to the World and Mankind, not only to do them no Injury, but to contribute every Way, as far as lies in their Power, to the Benefit and Advantage, Support and Relief of them. Their Duty to Heaven, is not only, not to reſiſt and rebel

rebel againſt, but to ſerve and obey, reverence and adore it continually. Let us then not only avoid all the Evil, but do all the Good we can, and not like the young Man rely upon our own Merit, becauſe we were not bad, but upon Chriſt's Merits, becauſe we have done all we could. *Amen.*

SERM. II.

St. MARY'*s*,
Oxon.

SERMON III.

The Penitent pardoned.

LUKE XXIII. 43.

And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, to day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.

THE Occasion of these comfortable Words of our Saviour to the expiring, penitent Thief, is evident to any one the least conversant in the New Testament; and this last wonderful Instance of his Clemency and Mercy towards sinful Man, in the Mouth of every the most illiterate Person; but, I believe, not so commonly understood. SERM. III.

Some have, from these Words, form'd that idle Notion of a Purgatory; and

SERM. III. thus do they go about to prove the Reality of that intermediate State; *To day shalt thou be with me in Paradise:* It would be quite foreign to all Interpretations, to conclude Paradise to be the *Hades*, or Hell; and to shew you it could not be Heaven, they bring in a Text, wherein our Saviour addresses himself to *Mary Magdalen*, who was come to lament over the Sepulchre, and to look for the Body of Jesus; *Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father.* Now, say they, where must the penitent Thief be with our Saviour that Day, when even now he declares, he had not ascended to the Father? This, it must be confess'd, was a lucky Expression for that profitable Doctrine to the Church of *Rome*; and they that were denied the Privilege of examining the Book of Life, might be imposed upon by it. But let me advise you to consult the Scriptures, they are undoubtedly the best and most infallible Interpreters of themselves, and will clear up this Difficulty and all others.

Consider who it was the Malefactor immediately address'd himself to; he did not

not look upon him as mere Man, but acknowledges him to be God; and in a firm Belief of that, which Flesh and Blood could not reveal to him, applies himself, after rebuking his Fellow-Sufferer, to our Saviour with the most undeniable Proof of a lively Faith; *Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy Kingdom.* Here then you must remember, when this Petition was made and granted, the Union between the Godhead and the Manhood was not dissolved, but when *Mary Magdalen* had that blessed Intercourse, it was: As to his Humanity, how far it was separated in order to his Descent into Hell, upon which is founded that Article of our Creed, we cannot determine, nor is it material, but we have enough revealed to us to believe such a Separation. Wherefore, though he had not as yet ascended to the Father, and glorified his Humanity, yet the penitent Thief might be with him in his Kingdom where he reigned with the Father before the World begun, as God. The Godhead was Omnipresent, and it would be as vain to think of excluding it Heaven one Moment, as to imagine it expiring

upon

SERM. III. upon the Croſs. This, likewiſe, clears that Paſſage from all other malicious Cavils, and preſumptious Diſputes, no leſs fooliſhly than blaſphemiouſly raiſed by modern Unbelievers. As firſt, that this Promiſe cannot be underſtood in a literal Senſe, as implying a Contradiction in Terms, and Infidelity is always prepared and ever glad to lay hold of any Expreſſion wherein there is any the leaſt Reſemblance of ſuch. Had they remembered, or rather, did they verily believe this Promiſe was made by him who was not only Perfect Man, but alſo Perfect God, ſuch Objections as theſe would never have been raiſed, and what is now excepted againſt as an Impoſſibility, would then be received and reverenced as an illuſtrious and undeniable Teſtimony of his Divinity.

But, ſecondly, Wherein is this ſuppoſed Contradiction ſo manifeſt? Our Bleſſed Saviour expreſly ſays to the penitent Thief, *To day ſhalt thou be with me in Paradiſe*; whereas he himſelf in another Place affirms, he was not aſcended to the Father ſome Days after; and hence they infer, that neither our Saviour or the Thief,

Thief, could be in Paradiſe at the appointed Time.

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But here they forget, as I before obſerved, that our Saviour was God, as well as Man, and therefore, though there was a Neceſſity for ſuch a Diſſolution of the Union between the Godhead, and the Manhood, in order to his Deſcent into Hell, yet is there no Occaſion, nay, rather, no Poſſibility of excluding the Godhead Heaven one Moment.

Some Time before his Crucifixion our Saviour took his Diſciples a-part and told them, that the Son of Man ſhould be delivered unto the Chief Prieſts and unto the Scribes, and that they ſhould condemn him to Death, and deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to ſcourge, and to crucify, but the third Day he would riſe again. And this alſo he muſt ſpeak in Regard only to his Manhood, otherwiſe this might likewiſe ſerve as an Objection from his own Words to the Poſſibility of his making his Promiſe good to the expiring Penitent: But after all, to think of coming to plain Demonſtration in Points ſo evidently myſterious, is equally abſurd and impoſſible.

Others

SERM. III. Others have drawn as delusive and dangerous a Conclusion from the Words of my Text another Way.

It was well, say they, for the penitent Thief, whose Repentance, though begun upon the Cross, and even after he had joined in reviling our Saviour, was immediately rewarded with a glorious Reception into Paradise. Hence inferring, that whatever some may talk of the Invalidity of a late Death-bed Repentance, God is disposed to receive the greatest Sinners into the Arms of his Mercy (upon the Supposition that their Contrition is sincere) even though they be at their last Gasp.

This is an unfair and an ungenerous Treatment of the Holy Scriptures: Because God pardoned one Penitent, who had it only in his Power to evidence a Sign of a lively Faith; therefore, he must ever be also willing to forgive those who repent and believe, only because they can sin no longer.

I must beg the Favour of your Patience, whilst I shew you the Falacy and Unreasonableness of this Conclusion, and see what useful Inferences may be drawn from this short Account to our Advantage.

Now,

Now, in the firſt Place, I muſt remark to you; we know little or nothing of this Perſon, either in Relation to his Crime, *i. e.* with what Temptation he might have been ſeduced to the Commiſſion of it; or under what preſſing Circumſtances he was in, that might prompt him to rob or ſteal; or as to his Character, before he fell into this unhappy Miſfortune; whether this was the firſt Offence, or whether he had been an open and notorious Violator of the Laws of God and Man; or, laſtly, whether he was not proſecuted through Envy and Malice, and condemned in Gratification of both. Theſe are Points, which, if we better underſtood, would mightily help us in our Enquiry. If the Temptation was ſtrong, it would extenuate the Guilt; if his Circumſtances were narrow and pinching, it would palliate (don't think I mean juſtify) the Crime; and if he had always bore a fair and reputable Character before, it would incline a leſs humane Man to pity him in the firſt Miſtake: But if he had been a known and notorious Violator of all Laws, human and divine, we cannot tell how really

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penitent

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penitent he might have been during the Time of his Confinement, and therefore the fitter Object for Mercy; and if prosecuted through Envy, still the more likely to solicit, and the surer to obtain that gracious Promise, *To day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.*

Another Thing let me observe to you, whenever you examine any of the surprizing or unusual Acts of Divine Mercy, you must never forget this: That Almighty God in the Instances of Love and Compassion, is never biass'd by Humour or Passion, neither is he moved by partial Fondness, which frequently determine the Proceedings of fallible tender Man. He ever acts with that Steadiness and Evenness that is peculiar only to infinite Goodness, guided by no less infinite Wisdom, and moderated by as infinite Justice; therefore all his Determinations are punctually consonant to Reason and Equity, though sometimes too deep for our shallow Comprehension. And again, as he is the Searcher of all Hearts, and has a clear View of the very Thoughts and Intentions, and from these can make a Difference in Favour of some above

others,

others, which we are incapable of doing; he can reward the Goodneſs of thoſe, which is not always to be meaſured by Time, or eſtimated by the Number of Acts produced by them, as in the Caſe before us; becauſe it may ſo fall out, that a very few, or one ſingle Inſtance may be ſo remarkable, as to give equal Teſtimony of a Man's Sincerity with Thouſands. It was neceſſary to premiſe thus far rightly to underſtand, and to make a proper Application of, the Example before us. This will alſo lead us to make an Enquiry into the good Diſpoſitions of the Penitent on the Croſs, which it is probable we ſhall find to be ſuch as might recommend him to Mercy, and incline our Saviour to that final Act of Goodneſs and Compaſſion.

It is the Opinion of ſome Divines, that this Man never heard any Thing of Jeſus before this Time, any further than by common Fame; of others, that he had, and was prejudiced againſt him, and joined his Companion in reviling him; therefore they conclude his Virtue the greater in maſtering thoſe early inſtill'd Opinions, and in permitting the Meekneſs,

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neſs and Patience, the Charity and Piety, of our Lord's miraculous Death, to convince him of his Error. And this, ſay they, is ſo far from making him a late Penitent, that it proves him an early Convert. If this was the Caſe, it is a ſtrong Indication that his Heart was properly mollified to receive the firſt Impreſſions of Grace, and that he wanted no Inclination, but rather an Opportunity to embrace the Truth.

However, let all this paſs for Conjecture, this I am ſure we ſafely may conclude, that his Acknowledgment of our Saviour at that Time, was ſo ſingular, ſo illuſtrious a Proof of a lively Faith, as Ages cannot paralel. He believes and confeſſes him, to be the Saviour of the World, after one Diſciple had traitorouſly betrayed him, another had ſhamefully denied him, and all of them ungratefully forſook him. He owns him to be the Son of God, and Lord of Life, when he was hanging upon the Croſs, in the Agonies of Death; and in all outward Appearance forſaken of the Father. What could be more brave? What could be more heroic, than to proclaim his Innocence

cence in the very Face of predominant Malice; and to take Sanctuary in the Interest and Favour of a Man now universally despised and rejected? Where did the Eye of Faith shew itself so discerning, as to discover the Glories of the Son of God through the blackest Clouds of Shame and Sufferings that ever intercepted the enlivening Rays of Divine Power? Was this a Time to acknowledge his Celestial Kingdom, and to confess him to be the great Disposer of Rewards and Happiness after Death, when he was undergoing the Torments of it himself? In short, we want Words to express the Greatness of it, Thought to display it, and nothing less than infinite Power, that did, could properly reward it. What Circumstances could make stronger in his Favour? Every Thing in his Power to be done, he had performed. He first acknowledges his own Wickedness, and confesses the Justice of Divine Providence in cutting him off for his Transgressions. The other Malefactor only wanted to be released from a temporal Death, but he seems to despise, or however to disregard that; and first asks him upon his reviling

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SERM. our Saviour, *Doest not thou fear God?*
III. A very material Question, and such as would incline one to believe, however he might have been betray'd into this Crime, his whole Life was not of a Piece with it. He then frankly confesses, *we receive the due Rewards of our Deeds; but this Man hath done nothing amiss.* This made room for that Mercy which crowned the most glorious Profession of Faith that ever Man made. Which Way is it possible for the Christian of our Days, to draw from hence any Arguments to support the Validity of a late Death-bed Repentance? The penitent Thief only believed upon the Cross and was saved. But let them consider, there is no Affinity, no Shadow of Resemblance or Similitude between a Man submitting to the first Impressions of Grace, and accepting, as soon as tendered, Offers of Mercy, and one who has lived under the Dispensation of the Gospel, and had not only the Benefit of hearing it taught and expounded, but likewise felt the secret Impulses of the Divine Spirit, and yet has for Years, or the best Part of his Life, wilfully shut his Ears to the one, and

and resisted and stifled the Influence of the other. The former paid the highest Degree of Homage and Respect to our Saviour, even when he had made himself of no Reputation, and was suffering in the Character of the vilest Malefactor, and adored and worshipped him as King of Heaven, though he was thus vanquished and subdued on Earth; the other, notwithstanding his Resurrection from the Dead, his Exaltation to Glory, the miraculous Conquest and Propagation of the Gospel, and the Danger of denying him now, even dares to insult and affront, villify and abuse, set at nought and contemn Christ in his victorious and triumphant State. In short, there is not one Argument that can be drawn from this Example in Favour of any Man who lives in Neglect of Christ and his Gospel the chief Part of his Life, that he shall be saved through the Merits of the former, or by the Influence of the latter, at the Time of his Death.

I will now, as I at first intended, see what useful Inferences may be made, and what good Improvements we may hope

SERM. III. from a proper Reflection upon this ſingular Example before us.

And, firſt, it ſhould teach us to be willing, and diſpoſe us to be ready to admit and embrace all divinely revealed Truths, and ſhew us the Benefit of a vigorous and lively Faith, and particularly of living and acting in Conformity to it. Every little Objection ariſing from any ſeeming Obſcurity, or Ambiguity in the Book of Life, ſhould vaniſh, when we conſider the great Diſadvantages the Penitent muſt neceſſarily labour under. No Paſſages relating to the incomprehenſible Nature of the ever Bleſſed Trinity ſhould any longer ſtagger our Faith, or pervert our Principles, which is as certainly attended with a Corruption of our Morals; none of the ſecret Workings of Providence, in our Eyes probably partial and unequal, ſhould raiſe any Jealouſy, or Diſturbance, in our Breaſts; inſtead of being amazed that one was ſo graciouſly pardoned and amply rewarded for an illuſtrious and ſhining Act of Faith, we ſhould rather be much more ſurprized, ſo many are permitted to remain no leſs

aſtoniſhing

aſtoniſhing Inſtances of Infidelity, unable to determine, whether the Juſtice or the Mercy of the Almighty diſplays itſelf more conſpicuouſly. Chriſtianity has now ſtood the ſevereſt Teſt of Seventeen Hundred Years, and the Scriptures have been ſhamefully and impiouſly ridiculed and diſtorted; the Malice of the grand Enemy of all Goodneſs has been induſtriouſly indulged by the buſy, but pernicious Wit of ingrateful Man; but yet you ſee our Saviour has hitherto kept his Word, *That the Gates of Hell ſhould not prevail againſt it*; let not then any of us deny our Aſſent, or render it dubious, by Thought, Word, or Deed, being well aſſured, if we remember and confeſs him here, he will not forget or diſown us in his Kingdom hereafter. Some People's doubting whether Juſtice could pardon, and moſt, wondering it ſhould ſo immediately reward the late Penitent, ſhould certainly teach us this ſhort Leſſon, to add to our Faith, Virtue. For Faith, while it remains ſingle, and ſolitary, is, as the ſacred Writers expreſs it, dead, but cloathed upon by Virtue,

SERM. III. it becomes animated and productive of the Fruits of Immortality. We want no Rewards to encourage us to Goodneſs, no Threats to deter us from Vice; we have Examples of Piety to ſtir us up to a commendable Emulation of excelling in Righteouſneſs, and ſuch amazing Inſtances recorded in Holy Writ of infinite Mercy, as well might make us, with the Ruler in the Goſpel, aſtoniſhed how theſe Things ſhould be. Let us make a proper Uſe of them, and in order to obtain the like gracious Anſwer, from the Lord of Life, when we come to bid Adieu to an unſatisfactory World, whilſt we are in it, chearfully and readily believe, devoutly and conſtantly practice, that he may comfortably ſalute the ſtruggling Soul——*To Day ſhalt thou be with me in Paradiſe.*

The laſt Remark I ſhall at this Time make to you, is, that here is a ſovereign Antidote againſt Deſpair; let our Sins be ever ſo numerous, our Offences ever ſo extraordinary, and our Crimes ever ſo malignant, yet upon a hearty ſincere Repentance, we are not to deſpair of Mercy

and

and Forgiveneſs. You may obſerve our Bleſſed Saviour was deaf to all the Indignities and Affronts the Scribes and Phariſees, and Rulers of the People, together with the Soldiers, put upon him: *He worked Miracles for the Preſervation of others, let him now ſave himſelf, if he be the Chriſt, the Choſen of God*; I ſay, he was deaf to all this Inſolence, and returned it no Anſwer; but no ſooner does a relenting Sinner addreſs himſelf for Pardon and Remiſſion, but his Ears are opened, and he makes him that glorious Promiſe.

What muſt be ſaid to thoſe who reject ſuch Proffers, and neglect ſo great Salvation? I will only tell the habitual, profligate Sinner, that ſuch a Thing as Repentance may poſſibly happen; but there is not ſo much as one Argument to be inferred from this Example, that it ſhall certainly happen. Let him conſider how the other Malefactor died, and remember that may be his Caſe. Repentance, when true, is never too late, but then Men may outſtay the Day of Grace; they may not go about

SERM. III. the Work, until it is too late, until they have neither Will, or Power to repent; and therefore this Example, when truly considered, ſhould prove, what I heartily wiſh you all will make it, an infallible Preſervative againſt Preſumption.

St. MARY'S,
Oxon.

SERMON

SERMON IV.

The Baptiſt's Meſſage anſwered.

MATTHEW XI. 2, 3.

Now when John *had heard in the Priſon the Works of Chriſt, he ſent two of his Diſciples, and ſaid unto him, Art thou he that ſhould come, or do we look for another?*

THE Reaſon of *John*'s being caſt into Priſon is well known to every one, the leaſt converſant in Scripture; but the Reaſon of his ſending two of his Diſciples with this Enquiry not ſo generally underſtood: It may not therefore be altogether uſeleſs to endeavour after a clearer Inſight into this Paſſage, and to conſider more particularly our Saviour's Reply to it.

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At

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At the first reading, some might apprehend the Baptist sent his Disciples to ask this Question with an Intent to satisfy himself, and conclude, that he was not as yet convinced, whether it was he that should come; and that he was not yet certain, whether he should not look for another. But the Case is far from being so: *John* was sensible that his Disciples had conceived great Things of him, and, in short, entertained too high Notions concerning him, though he had frequently told them, he was not the Christ: But their Opinions of him were so closely rivetted, that he plainly foresaw that his still denying it was by them imputed only to his Modesty, and his Assertions to the contrary did but serve to confirm their Belief.

But about this Time you find the Fame of *Jesus* was mightily spread abroad, insomuch that it reached the Ears of *John*, even in the Prison; nor can we imagine but his Disciples also must have heard it, and perhaps were not a little influenced by it; wherefore the Baptist might judge this a proper Season to confirm their wavering Minds, and that a Sight of those

Miracles

Miracles which they had heard were done by him, would prove the most undeniable Argument for their Conviction. When we come to consider more particularly our Saviour's Method of proving himself, he that should come, we shall find more Reason to believe this was the Case.

We cannot conclude, that he who leaped in the Womb when *Elizabeth* heard the Salutation of *Mary*, should now be ignorant of the Messiah in Prison. He had long before told the enquiring *Jews*, that he was *the Voice of one crying in the Wilderness; make straight the Way of the Lord.* At another Time, seeing *Jesus* coming unto him, he saith, *Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the Sins of the World. This is he, of whom I said, After me cometh a Man, which is preferred before me; for he was before me.* The next Day after *John* stood, and two of his Disciples, and looking upon *Jesus* as he walked, he saith, *Behold the Lamb of God.* And the two Disciples heard him speak, and they followed *Jesus.* Let us now then examine the Method which our Saviour took to convince

SERM. IV. vince them that it was he that should come, and that they should not look for another, and that will abundantly clear up this Passage.

John, very sensible our Saviour best knew how to heal their Infirmities, and cure their Unbelief, sends his Disciples with this Question; and *Jesus* being well assured, that Signs and Miracles would be a stronger Proof of his Messiahship than bare Assertion, especially from himself, without returning them an immediate Answer, first performs these before their Eyes: He heals the Sick, and casts out unclean Spirits, restores the Weak, and opens the Eyes of the Blind, and then says unto them, *Go, and shew* John *again, those Things which ye do hear and see. The Blind receive their Sight, and the Lame walk; the Lepers are cleansed, and the Deaf hear; the Dead are raised up, and the Poor have the Gospel preached to them. And Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me. These Things sufficiently demonstrate who I am.*

The Disciples of *John* were a little picqued, that their Master's Fame should be eclipsed by our Saviour, and therefore he

he concludes, *And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me*: Modestly rebuking their Envy, so as not to discountenance them before the Multitude, but that they tacitly might confess their Error; every Way adapting his Answer so as to avoid Arrogance himself, and yet to confirm and establish his own Disciples in their Belief, choosing rather to heal than betray their Affection.

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Another Thing not unworthy our Notice, is, the Discourse of our Saviour's to the Multitude after the Dismission of *John*'s Disciples. He was apprehensive that they might from this Question conclude, the Baptist was not confirmed in his own Breast, but had sent these as much to satisfy himself, as to convince them; therefore he addresses himself to them in the following Manner, wherein he ascribes to him his due Merit and Praise in Subordination to himself, and confirms his own Divinity, by strengthening *John*'s Testimony. It was expedient the People should have no mean Opinion of the Forerunner of Christ, one who had testified concerning him so openly and so clearly, that he was the Son, *the*

Lamb

SERM. IV. *Lamb of God which took away the Sins of the World*; that it was he who should baptize with the Holy Ghost and with Fire. Therefore, says he, *what went ye out into the Wilderness for to see? A Reed shaken with the Wind? But what went ye out for to see? A Man clothed in soft Raiment? behold they that wear soft Clothing are in King's Houses. But what went ye out for to see? A Prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and more than a Prophet*; which Words without any extraordinary Wresting may admit of the following Explanation.

First, *what went ye out for to see? A Reed shaken with the Wind?* As much as to say, if you can imagine that *John* now suspects the Truth of what he oftentimes so peremptorily asserted, *viz.* That I am he that should come, then may you be said to have had the Curiosity to go out after a Man as wavering in his Opinion as a Reed is in its Station before the Wind; for to such a Thing might he justly be resembled, did he now doubt or disbelieve what he so frequently has preached. But, from any Suspicion of this, his own continued

Austerity

Austerity of Life is a sufficient Vindication. There is no room to suspect his Veracity, as if he had falsely preached Christ; or to question his Inconstancy, as if he was now dubious, and undetermined concerning him.

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But what went ye out for to see? a Man clothed in soft Raiment? The Desert was not a proper Place to see that in; those Sights are only common in King's Palaces; those Nurseries of Luxury, Inconstancy, and Adulation; but he that fed upon Locusts and wild Honey only, and whose Raiment was of Camels Hair, and a leathern Girdle about his Loins, must be averse to all these. And though he was no Stranger at *Herod*'s Court, yet the Splendor and Grandeur of it, and his Familiarity there, had no Effect upon him to change his Austerity of Life: Nay, and his now being in Prison was itself a Proof he neither knew how, or would submit to flatter or dissemble.

But what went ye out for to see? A Prophet? Why the Deserts are generally the Abodes of such. Therein you were not disappointed. Then you beheld more than a Prophet, for he was the immediate

SERM. IV. diate Forerunner of the Messiah, and did not, as the rest did, promise him to the World, but pointed him out with his Finger——*Behold the Lamb of God.*

Thus we see our Saviour entirely clears *John* from any Suspicion of Doubt or Dissimulation, and at the same Time that he gives him his due Honour and Praise, renders it subservient to confirm his own Divinity.

Thus much may not be deemed unnecessary to clear up this Passage from all seeming Obscurity; and now let us pass on to another reasonable Conjecture, Why *John* should at that Time send his Disciples with this Enquiry? The Reason of *John*'s Imprisonment, as I before observed to you, is in the Mouth of every one the least acquainted with the New Testament, and it is probable he might conclude his Disciples would soon forsake him, when they perceived there were no Hopes of his Liberty; and as he was sensible of the bittereſt Resentment of an enraged Prostitute, he might look upon his Prison as not many Steps from his Grave, as it afterwards really proved; upon this Account, therefore I say, he

migh

might then be more anxious for their Conviction before his Death, of their Dispersion. He was sensible of the great Opposition our Saviour met with from the Obstinacy and Incredulity of many of the *Jews*; and of the imminent Danger that threatned his Disciples should they forsake him in his Confinement, or remain unconverted until the Malice of a wicked Prostitute had appeased itself by putting an untimely End to his Life. This, I say, might probably be the Motive of the Baptist's sending them with so singular a Question; a satisfactory Answer to which could not fail convincing them who was the Christ, and consequently of making them his Disciples.

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Wonder not that they should not be persuaded by *John* himself; for though his preaching and strict Regularity of Life had gained him that Reputation, that he was suspected, not only by his Disciples, but many of the *Jews*, to be the Christ, yet, as these high Opinions were chimerically entertained, so were they as unaccountably changed. For, we find them at some Times saying of *John*, that he had a Devil, when offended with his Auste-

SERM. IV. sterity, as well as of our Saviour, *That he was a Glutton and a Wine-bibber, a Friend of Publicans and Sinners*, when displeased with his Freedom and Compliance, Familiarity and Indulgence. Our blessed Saviour himself alludes to this in another Place of this Chapter, saying, *But whereunto shall I liken this Generation? It is like unto Children sitting in the Markets, and calling unto their Fellows, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented. For* John *came neither eating nor drinking, and they say he hath a Devil. The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a Man gluttonous and a Wine-bibber, a Friend of Publicans and Sinners; but Wisdom is satisfied of her Children.*

I shall take the Liberty of giving this short Comment upon these Words. This Proverb of the Children in the Market Place our Saviour makes Use of to display the Obstinacy of the *Jews*, who were neither worked upon by the Austerity of *John*, to fear and revere Divine Justice, nor excited by the Humanity and Tenderness of Christ, to love and adore it.

it. As if he had said, *John* the Baptist, like the Children that mourned, came preaching Repentance in doleful Strains, setting them an Example of Mortification and Self-Denial, neither eating Bread, or drinking Wine, living in the Desart; his Clothing of Camel's Hair, tied with a leathern Girdle. But they are so far from being moved to Repentance, by either his Doctrine or his Example, that what was intended to provoke them to it, they turn into Ridicule, saying, *He was mad, and had a Devil.*

The Son of Man came, like the Children piping, inviting them to Salvation in more lively Sounds; free of Access, enjoining no Rigours; without Menaces or Threats, but using all Engagements and Allurements to all, to love: Eating and drinking like others, conversing freely, differing from no one either in Food or Raiment. And lo! his Affability and Good-Nature, his Humility and Condescension, which should have begot the same in them, is made the Subject of their Scorn and Derision. *Behold a Man gluttonous, and a Wine-bibber, a Friend of Publicans and Sinners.* But in

SERM. IV. vain does the Malice of Men oppose the Council of Divine Wisdom.

Having thus cleared the Words of my Text from any Imputation that might be inferred from them, either of *John* the Baptist's Ignorance, or Doubt of our blessed Saviour, and proved not only from his own repeated Testimony, that it was merely to convince his Disciples, in order to resign them to him whom he knew as he decreased *he* must increase; that he sent them with this Question, but likewise from the Discourse of our Saviour to the *Jews* after their Dismission. Let us now proceed to consider, whether the Baptist at this Time had not the greatest Reason to desire the Conversion of his Disciples, and that merely upon Account of the Obstinacy and Incredulity of the *Jews*, in vilifying and withstanding the plainest and greatest Miracles wrought for their Conviction.

If Time would permit, Necessity does not require we should examine every particular Miracle with their Objections and our Saviour's Replies, wherefore we may begin with that wrought upon the Blind and Dumb, and for which that no

less

less false than malicious Aspersion, of being aided and assisted by *Beelzebub*, was first cast upon him. SERM. IV.

When the Blind saw and the Dumb spoke, the People were amazed, and said, *Is not this the Son of* David, *whom the Prophets have promised?* and well might they be induced to make that Reflexion. The *Pharisees*, ever jealous lest the People should believe on him, could not deny the Truth of what they had seen, and therefore endeavour, to alienate the Minds of the Mulitude, by first assuring them, that whenever the Son of *David* came, he would be supported by Divine Power, and restore again the Kingdom to *Israel*; and then granting them what they had seen, was wonderful, endeavoured to deceive them, and degrade our Saviour, by assuring them, *He was a Breaker of the Law and the Sabbath, a Glutton and a Wine-bibber, a Friend of Publicans and Sinners*; and therefore what he had performed, was thro' the Assistance of *Beelzebub*, the Prince of the Devils.

The Method our Saviour took manifestly to disprove this vile Assertion, is worth our Observation and Imitation also;

SERM. IV.

for, at the same Time that he shews the Absurdity of the Reproach, he avoids casting any Reflexions upon them, but rather endearingly invites them to embrace the Truth, and their own Salvation.

Every Kingdom, says he, rent with intestine Discord, necessarily is brought to Desolation, and without Union and Unanimity, neither a City, or even a House, can stand. And if *Satan* cast out *Satan*, he must be divided against himself, how shall then his Kingdom stand? The Absurdity of this Assertion speaks itself. But how can it be conceived, since *Satan* is universally confessed the Grand Enemy of Mankind, and thirsts after nothing more than their Destruction, or envies aught so much as their Felicity, that he should ever oppose himself for Man's Interest and Advantage? Had our Saviour stopped here, it would have been sufficient to have shewn the Unreasonableness of this Calumny. But he proceeds to argue calmly and further with them: *If I by* Beelzebub *cast out Devils, by whom do your Children cast them out?* As much as if he had said, it is plain and undeniable, that if they cast them

them out by the Power of God, I cannot be said to do it by the Assistance of the Devil, because they cast them out in my Name. They cast them out, and ye reproach not them, it is me only that ye reproach; and yet they received that Power from me.

From this he descends to a plain, but beautiful Allusion, which is this——— *Either make the Tree good and his Fruit good, or else make the Tree corrupt, and his Fruit corrupt; for the Tree is known by his Fruit:* Which may easily be rendered; why do you calumniate the Tree, meaning himself, when ye cannot but approve the Fruit, thereby alluding to his Miracles. They are all wrought for the Relief and Benefit of the Afflicted and Helpless, none of them tending to the Prejudice or Disadvantage of any. They are not performed out of any vain Ostentation or Pride, but for the common Good of the Afflicted, as well as for your Conviction. How can you, therefore, be so perverse as to ascribe what is so apparently good to the Father and Author of all Evil? Were you not obstinately and wilfully set against the Truth, you

SERM. IV. could not reason so inconsistently; for now even *Common Sense* disproves your Objections. Confess, therefore, either that I am acted by a good Spirit, since you cannot but allow my Works to be good; or say that my Works are evil, if you will maintain that I do them by *Beelzebub*, that there may at least be some Probability in what you affirm. Remember, *the Tree is known by its Fruit.*

Hitherto I have confined myself to our Blessed Saviour's own Reply, as sufficient to confute, though it did not convince them.

Before I conclude, I shall just beg Leave to mention another Instance of the Inveteracy and Folly of their Proceedings against him, upon the Account of another of his Miracles: His calling *Lazarus* from the Grave. I must remind you, they display'd their Malice towards our Saviour, in casting the blind Man out of the Synagogue, for strenuously defending his Honour, and patronizing his Power and Goodness, in restoring him to his Sight; but here they could not restrain themselves within any Bounds: Nothing less than the Life *Jesus* had recalled would satisfy, and *Lazarus* must

must forfeit that to their Cruelty, which he just now owed to his Pity. The Folly as well as Inveteracy of this their Attempt, are equally manifest: For alas! had they accomplished their wicked Design, could they be so foolish as to conclude it would have been more difficult for our Saviour to have restored that Life, violently taken away, than it was to recall that naturally resigned, and had they cunningly secreted the Body, would there have been more Difficulty to have summoned him to appear out of the most secret Depository, than it was to call him out of the silent Grave? That Voice which reached his Ears in the cold Confinement of the one, and cryed, *Lazarus, come forth*, would likewise have penetrated into the inmost Recesses of the other, and he would have obeyed: And that Life violently taken away, would have as quickly returned, as that naturally cut off. Their Inveteracy, indeed, was such as could only be exceeded by their Folly: *Lazarus* was a Man to whom they could impute no Guilt, either from Words or Action, and on whom even Detraction itself could fasten no

Crime.

SERM. IV.

Crime. But he was now become a living Demonstration of *Jesus*'s Omnipotency, and therefore, only, an Object of their Revenge: They had no Way of evading the Force of his Evidence, and could not so feasibly impute his being restored to Life to the Assistance or Power of the Devil, as they no less falsely did other Miracles, because no one was so weak as absurdly to believe a less Power than that which first gave, could restore Life; wherefore, what they could not contradict, they thus foolishly endeavour to destroy.

For these Reasons, amongst many more that might be alledged, I say, *John* might be especially desirous of the Conversion of his Disciples, before either his Death, which he might justly apprehend was daily plotting and contriving by one of those, whose Power, all Ages tell us, is irresistable, and ours in particular, or their Dispersion, which would necessarily ensue.

I know it may be objected, that the last Miracle I mentioned, and the Inveteracy of the *Jews* in return, happened long after the Baptist's Beheading; in

Answer

Answer to which I shall only make this short Reply; that there is no Doubt but he who was more than a Prophet from the Usage he saw our Saviour meet with, did likewise foresee what Treatment would afterwards befal him; and from the Miracles he had either seen or heard of, could be no entire Stranger to those that would succeed.

I have cleared up this Passage in the Words of my Text, as far as I am able, and given you the best Reasons I could, wherefore *John* sent his Disciples with that Enquiry, and why at that Time, and enlarged upon our Saviour's Reply; and now have nothing more to add, but that as the *Jews* themselves, amongst whom these Miracles were wrought, could never disprove any one of them, or discover aught of the Impostor, but only alledge in Contradiction to them, that our Saviour was assisted by *Beelzebub*, that they are the strongest Proofs, that he really was, what he so undeniably manifested himself thereby to be, He that should come; and the most unanswerable Arguments of their Wickedness,

SERM. IV. neſs, and all others, to ſay no worſe of it, who ſtill look for another.

To him, therefore, with the Father, and the Holy Ghoſt, let us aſcribe, as is moſt due, All Honour, Power, Praiſe, Might, Majeſty, and Dominion, now and for evermore.

Amen.

St. MARY's,
Oxon.

SERMON

SERMON V.

Christianity the only Freedom; Libertinism truly Slavery.

MATTHEW II. 30.

For my Yoke is easy, and my Burden is light.

IN the preceding Verses our Blessed Saviour addresses himself to disconsolate and pensive Sinners in the most comfortable and engaging Words, which are inserted in our excellent Liturgy in the Administration of the Holy Communion, *Come unto me, all that travail, and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you.* Here he subjoins the Reason, willing to remove Despair or Despondence from those over whom Sin had gained so great an Ascendant, and to expel Inconsideration and Rashness from those whom

SERM. V.

Satan

SERM. V. *Satan* had made desperate. *For my Yoke is easy, and my Burden is light.* It is scarce possible to conceive any Thing could be said more encouraging to a languishing Sinner, or more prevalent to a wilful one: *This* might securely return to him in sure and certain Hopes of Refreshment, and *That* might be moved to it, being assured to what even Sinners would be thought to err for, an easier Yoke, and to carry a lighter Burden. Few, I dare say, but what have remark'd, wherever *Satan* has reigned, there likewise has he imprinted either a sullen Gloomliness, and a confirmed Melancholy, or a wild Madness and an extravagant Flow of Passion; both Strangers to that calm Tranquility, that sweet Serenity, that may better be felt than expressed.

When such Overtures as these are made by God, and Man is either deaf to, or rejects them, why should we be surprized to hear him at one Time in an anxious Interval call Life a Burden; at another, see him act in such Transport of Passion, as if he looked upon Death only as Annihilation? His Actions render these Opinions desirable, and what we desire, we

are

are prone to believe. But on the contrary, he who joyfully embraceth theſe gracious Promiſes, and liveth in a careful Obedience to, and Obſervance of the Terms upon which they are made, makes every Day productive of additional Bleſſings, and every Action a Proof of his Rationality and his internal Tranquility. His Life is one continued Argument of the Truth of our Saviour's Aſſertion; and, in ſhort, the whole Man confeſſes, that God is the Author of Peace, and that his Service only is perfect Freedom.

To make this appear more evidently, let us conſider upon what Grounds the Chriſtian acts, and why the Yoke of Chriſt may more properly be deemed eaſy, and his Burden light, and at the ſame Time examine into the Unreaſonableneſs of the Freethinker, whether Deiſt, Atheiſt, Socinian, or Arian (for to me there is not much Difference amongſt them) and from thence ſee whether he has any great Reaſon to conclude his imaginary Liberty any Freedom.

And firſt; the Chriſtian not only believes a God, but likewiſe a Mediator: Reaſon has ſhewn him the Truth of the one,

SERM. V. one, and Revelation has ascertained him the Necessity of the other. He is conscious of his own present Imperfections and Errors, however perfect the first State of Man might have been; but as he believes upon the Word of that God whom he knows he has offended, that he has wonderfully contrived a Method to satisfy Infinite Justice, without exacting legal Punishment from him, so is he never cast down, though abundantly penitent, at the Recollection of them. This makes him thankful for his Creation, Preservation, 'but above all, for that inestimable Love 'in the Redemption of the World by our 'Lord Jesus Christ.' He is not disturbed at the various Workings of Providence, nor confounded, though concerned, at the Madness and Folly of the People: This he knows cannot affect him, without the Permission of the other. In order, therefore, to recommend himself to its Favour and Protection, constant as the Morn returns, and Nature awakens into Being from Insensibility, he pays his early Addresses to that Being who controuls the unruly Wills and Affections of sinful Men, and joins the universal Chorus in celebrating

ting his Praiſe, whom to praiſe is the Fulneſs of Joy. Duly as the ſilent Night approaches, apt to inſpire ſolemn Thoughts, he caſts up the Bleſſings of the Day, and is thankful; marks and repents the Failings of it, and having adjuſted Accounts, commits himſelf to his Care, who neither ſlumbereth nor ſleepeth; his Innocence, like the poor Man's Labour, making Sleep ſweet.

SERM. V.

Thus beginning and ending the Day, each Morning, as he riſes, paying his early Homage, and praying for his Direction, who liſtneth to every one that ſincerely aſketh; and each Night recommending himſelf to the ſame Truſt, the intermediate Space is ſure to be filled up with that Peace which this World cannot give.

But perhaps it may be aſked, why does he believe a Revelation? and upon what Grounds does he build his Confidence? I might, indeed, enlarge upon this Anſwer ſufficient for Diſcourſes of this Kind; but I will rather chooſe to be as conciſe as I can, without being obſcure. Without magnifying Reaſon, that boaſted Prerogative of Mankind, he knows

SERM. V. it deficient, in tracing many necessary Truths; as for Instance, which Way to satisfy Infinite Justice when once he has offended: Which Way to account for the present Depravity of Human Nature, or what will be the future Condition of even the best of Men. He is not so presumptive, as to boast of unerring Obedience; so upright, as to think he is as perfect as Human Nature was originally created, nor so intelligent, as to demonstrate, that imperfect Services shall be crowned with absolute and infinite Happiness. He rather chooses to reason thus: An all-wise and merciful Being, after he had created Man, would not leave him to the Direction of what woeful Experience has long shewn us is fatal; but give him some Rules to modulate his Conduct by; and as Man must be sensible of his Disobedience, prevent his Despair by some Discoveries of Pardon and Reconciliation. These Intimations of his Will, he would manifest were actually from himself, either by immediate Signs from above, or impowering his Agents to confirm themselves divinely commissioned to impart and enjoin them. And

since

ſince theſe have evidently been performed, and a Revelation handed down, every Way ſuitable to the Dignity of God, with the Terms of our Salvation; confirmed by undeniable Miracles, and ſufficient Teſtimony of Divine Authority; he will not ſo much be backward in believing, as at a Loſs how to be gratefully thankful for, and altogether obſervant of it. The Precepts he will endeavour to obey, the illuſtrious Examples he will, as far as Circumſtances concur, ſtudy to imitate; the remarkable Inſtances of Providence, will ſerve to animate his Faith, and the Unfoldings of the Divine Nature will raiſe and excite his Love and Adoration. This he will perceive to be a reaſonable Service, and, contrary to all others, the longer and ſtricter he continues in it, the more eaſy and agreeable will the Duty grow. A conſtant Search in all other Enquiries, or an inceſſant Application to any other Employment, dulls or palls the Mind; but here it has ever freſh Entertainment, ſomething new to admire, and always what is good to adore.

SERM. V.

SERM. V.

When he is filled with such Sentiments of the Almighty Being, as his Revelation is apt to inspire, Obedience and Worship, will be so far from bearing the Appearance of Servitude, that they will manifest themselves to be not only the greatest Privilege, but the greatest Freedom and Advantage of human Nature. What Infinite Goodness enjoins, will never be looked upon as a Hardship, and what Infinite Mercy requires, must be no Way detrimental; Infinite Wisdom must prescribe Rules infallible; and if Man cannot always discover their direct Tendency to Good, he must not charge it to any Deficiency in them, but rather to some Imperfection in himself.

This is what the sincere Christian believes, and it is founded upon Truth: But what must we say of the Libertine, who rejects the Book of Life, and sets up Reason in Opposition to Revelation? Is there any Thing wanting to render Men better, any Thing that can give a greater Sanction to Virtue, or has Reason any more awful Influence to deter Men from Vice? Has it greater Rewards

wards for its Votaries, or ſharper Puniſhment for Tranſgreſſors? Does it incline Men more ſtrongly to univerſal Love and Benevolence, or has it any more efficacious Motives to make Men more honeſt, upright, or ſincere? Within what Limits would it pretend to preſcribe Infinite Juſtice, or what Bounds would it fix for the Sinner? Will it appoint him the Number of his Tranſgreſſions, and ſay hitherto ſhalt thou paſs with Impunity, and no further? Did ever Reaſon whiſper to Man, he had an immortal, immaterial Soul, and that *this Corruption muſt put on Incorruption, and this Mortal, Immortality?* Alas! theſe are Truths only brought to Light by the Promulgation of that Goſpel, Reaſon pretends to outvie. And what is the Yoke it would hang upon us, or the Burden it would lay on us? The gauling Tramel of all our Sins, and the inſupportable Load of all our Iniquities. No Happineſs to be looked for, but what our imperfect Services, I ſhould rather ſay, our wilful Diſobedience, merits; no Incentive to ſocial Duties, but what Reaſon dictates, and no Glimpſe of eter-

SERM. V.

nal Glory, but through the dark Cloud of human Comprehension.

And whence arises this strange Partiality in Favour of Reason? if it is through a Presumption of its own Sufficiency, any one of these Reflexions are sufficient to confute it; if it presumes on its own Strength and Ability, every Action of Life makes against it. But there are Things contained in Revelation above its Comprehension; why alas! there is not one Thing in the Creation, but what is equally a Mystery, if Man will pretend to account for the Manner of its Production. That is not the Case, here lies the Uneasiness; Vice and Immorality are too generally prohibited, and the Wages of Sin are too manifestly writ down! It is not that Men disbelieve, to become better Men, but they patronise Infidelity, in Vindication of Immorality. Their Wills and Affections are too strongly biassed towards Vice, to run in the Grounds of Virtue, and they do not properly use, but rather indeed abuse, what they so much contend for, their *Liberty*. Without Doubt, a good Christian must be on all Accounts the most compleatly

happy;

happy; eaſy in himſelf, and reſpectful to others; loving and beloved, poſſeſſing or deſiring every Quality that may render him worthy of Human and Divine Applauſe, correcting and deſtroying every Habit undeſerving of either. And is it poſſible to ſuſpect thoſe Leaves, wherein he is thus inſtructed, ſhould be the Compoſition of a fallible or deſigning Author? As well might we expect to *gather Grapes off Thorns, or Figs off Thiſtles. Whatſoever Things are true, whatſoever Things are honeſt, whatſoever Things are juſt, whatſoever Things are pure, whatſoever Things are lovely, whatſoever Things are of good Report, if there be any Virtue, and if there be any Praiſe*, theſe are enforced and enjoined in the ſtrongeſt Terms, and, I believe, for that Reaſon only, rejected by Unbelievers.

It has been remarked by an eminent Writer of this Church, and that very judiciouſly, that Men that have ſequeſtered themſelves from the World, to meditate in Solitude and Retirement, have no ſtrong Biaſs to Intemperance, Senſuality and Diſhoneſty, Vices, that are inconſiſtent with a Life devoted to Study.

SERM. V. The Sin that easily besets them, is a splenetick Pride; Discontent, a Spirit of Opposition, a Desire to be distinguished by the Singularity of their Notions: And it is as hard for them to get the better of this inordinate Desire of Distinction, as it is for Men, long practised in the World, to conquer their Love of Pleasure, Honour or Riches. Yet, says he, by gratifying this dry, joyless, uncomfortable Pride, they shall do more Disservice to the World, than the most abandoned Voluptuary by a Life spent in the mad Sallies of Intemperance. They shall lead the Lives of Hermits, that others, without Remorse of Conscience, may spend theirs in Debauchery: They shall teach People to be wicked upon Principle, which is the most incurable Kind of Wickedness. The Moon that glides along in Silence, with a pale, serene and sober Light, yet is the Cause of all the Working and Swelling of the Deep, is a proper Emblem of these Men, who at the same Time, that they seem to be unconcerned Spectators, without mixing with the World, are yet the great Occasions, by the Principles which they

they propagate, of the Diſorder and Vice which prevails in it. SERM. V.

I ſhall now juſt beg Leave to make a few Obſervations, and conclude.

If the Libertine's Veneration for Morality was real, and his Reverence and Eſteem for Virtue, any Thing but Pretence, ſure he would not be at ſo much Pains to tear and rend to Pieces the compleateſt Syſtem the World has produced, and vilify and leſſen the Author of it; or if he only intended a Reformation, and to make Men better, he would never contribute ſo much to let them underſtand how bad they might be. He would not be ſo anxious that People ſhould be ſo ſhocked and affrighted at the Apprehenſions of the fatal Conſequences of Sin, nor ſo induſtrious in removing all the Terrors that were deſigned to prevent the Commiſſion of it. But alas! his Encomiums are not unlike the Salutation of that Diſciple, who betrayed his Maſter with a Kiſs.

Another Thing let me obſerve to you; as Chriſt has aſſured us, his Yoke is eaſy, and his Burden is light, do not offer to make the one gauling, or the other inſupportable.

SERM. V. supportable. It really must be Matter of no small Concern to any who have a tolerable Sense of Religion, to see it altogether set at nought, and ridiculed by one Set of Men; and by another moulded and worked up into downwright Enthusiasm. It is hard to say, whether is of most Disservice, to refine it into nothing, or to make it a mere Bug-bear: This, pleases and undoes the unthinking and looser Part, and that fills the more timorous and little Reasoning with Despair or Distraction: This is, indeed, according to an old Observation, crucifying Religion, like its Author, between two Thieves. All Pharisaical Ostentation, in which that Sect abounds, is as repugnant to the Doctrine of Christ, as Libertinism is opposite to Revelation; and the one is as productive of spiritual Pride, as the other of presumptive Understanding. Christianity has nothing harsh or discouraging, frightful or forbidding in it; but is every Way adapted to make us easy in this World, and happy in the next: Nor does it expect its Votaries should entirely be free from the Infirmities, as long as they are clogged with the Incumbrances

of

of Fleſh and Blood. Next to obeying God, univerſal Kindneſs and Affection are the Motives it propoſes for our Actions; and Moderation, Good-nature, Affability, Temperance and Chaſtity, are all the Arts it requires. In ſhort, there is no Perfection, but what it encourages, no Amiableneſs, but what it countenances, no innocent Liberty, but what it allows; and was it heartily embraced, and thereby ſuffered to have its natural Effects, it would undoubtedly produce what the Harbingers of our Saviour's Birth divinely ſung, *Glory to God in the Higheſt, and on Earth, Peace, Good-will towards Men. Amen.*

St. MARY'S,
Oxon.

SERMON

SERMON VI.

The Prophets of the Lord no false Prophets.

1 KINGS XXII. 21, 22.

And there came forth a Spirit, and stood before the Lord, and said, I will persuade him.

And the Lord said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a Lying Spirit in the Mouth of all his Prophets. And he said, thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also: Go forth, and do so.

SERM. VI.

THERE is no Attribute of God more sacred, and consequently more firmly to be relied on, than his Truth; could any Thing be inferred from either his Councils or Determinations,

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tions, Actings or Proceedings, with the Sons of Men, inconsistent or incompatible with this, it would alone render the Perfection of his Existence deficient, and the Divinity of his Being incongruous. No Extremes can possibly be conceived more opposite, than he to Falsity, nor can the Divine Nature be more sensibly insulted, than to suspect its Veracity. As it is the peculiar Excellency of God also that he cannot be deceived, or imposed upon, so likewise is he no less adorable, in that he neither will or can deceive and impose upon others: God is Truth, as the Scriptures affirm; and, in short, it is so essential to him, that without it all his other Attributes would only serve to make him dreaded or distrusted, but never contribute to have him loved or adored. Infinite Justice may well affright and alarm us; and Infinite Mercy, so long as we are uncertain how, and to whom it will extend, will give us but little Comfort or Consolation; Infinite Love, if it is precarious where it will center, will, at the best, but leave us in Doubt or Despair; but then Infinite Power to punish our Offences, and Infinite Knowledge to

discover

discover or detect them, will utterly expel all Hopes of Pardon or Reconciliation, whilst we have no Dependance upon his Veracity, who is thus vested with these Attributes to recompence or revenge himself upon his Creatures.

On the other Hand, his Justice will not carry along with it so much of that Terror and Dread, whilst we are assured it will be prescribed within Mercy; his Love will also raise and animate us under the greatest and severest Afflictions, give us Confidence and sure Hope, so long as we are confirmed no one shall solicit it in vain, and that our Affection to him will render us Objects of it; his Power will only incite us to a more chearful and unwearied Obedience, in order to secure his Protection; and a Conviction of his Knowledge beget in us a more constant and sincere Observation of his Precepts in *private*, in certain Expectation of his Praise and Approbation in publick.

But may it not be objected that the Words of my Text seem, at least, to countenance a Notion, no less foolishly than falsly entertained, that if God does not immediately deceive and impose upon

his

SERM. VI.

his Creatures himself, yet he impowers others to do it, and suffers them to be deceived and imposed upon by their Delusions; and, consequently, from thence casts a Blemish upon, what should be untainted and unsullied, that Attribute of his, his Truth? For do not we read, when the Lord asked the Spirit that stood before him, wherewith he would persuade *Ahab*, that he answered, *I will be a Lying Spirit in the Mouth of all his Prophets. And he said, thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also; go forth, and do so?* If from these Words it cannot be directly inferred, that God himself stoops so low as to delude and deceive, and act the Impostor; yet sure it may be hence concluded, that he commissions or permits others to do it, not without assuring them of Success.

Before I make any Reply, in order to clear up this Passage from all the Objections that can be drawn from it against God's Truth and Veracity, which may likewise be of Service to clear many others of the like Nature (and which, by God's Assistance, I do not despair of performing) I will take the Liberty of making an Observation

ſervation of two, not altogether unworthy your Notice.

And firſt; The Scriptures of both Old and New Teſtament have undoubtedly met with the unjuſteſt, the unfaireſt Treatment of any Writings extant; and that, firſt, either from thoſe, on the one Hand, who have preſumptuouſly dared to interpret and explain, open and expound them, without either Knowledge to direct, Learning to aſſiſt, Authority to ſupport, or any one proper Qualification to entitle them to that Office. Men, whoſe Want of Education has only been equalled by their Impudence; and their Aſſurance exceeded by nothing ſo much as their Ignorance. Men, ſo far from being accuſtomed to the peculiar Form of Scripture Phraſe, and acquainted with the particular Expreſſions, common and current only in Holy Writ, and the Languages they were promulgated in, that they have been no leſs Strangers to the former, than altogether ignorant of the latter; nay! and often ſo far from being Maſters of any, that they have confeſſedly been Novices in their own Language.

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The ſtrange Doctrines that theſe Men have frequently advanced, when following the Bent of their *heated* Imaginations, and the Texts of Scripture they have miſerably tortured to ſupport and confirm it, are too numerous to be repeated, and too inconſiſtent and trifling to be confuted; too foreign to their Purpoſe to need a Detection of Falacy, and too inconcluſive to prove them *Anti-ſcriptural.* 'Tis true, many have ſuffered themſelves to be deluded by them; but I am afraid, of late Years, their Number has been far exceeded by thoſe, who through a juſt and true ridiculing of their Arguments, have thereby thought themſelves equally Maſters of all Caſuiſts in Divinity, and Advocates of Religion, as of them, and therefore inſolently and triumphantly proclaimed themſelves Enemies and Adverſaries to All.

Truth, 'tis true, will not haraſs a good Diſputant much to defend her; but then, an unequal one, or an unable one, by his unmanly Defence, ſhall more expoſe her to the Inſults, and more ſenſibly betray her to the Snares of her avowed Enemy, than Error in the Head,

even

even of her most subtle and designing Adversary, can subject her to. Weapons in the Hands of a weak Man, are no more likely to be used discreetly or advantageously, than those in the Hands of a mad one safely. SERM. VI.

Hence has arisen that unjust Treatment the Scriptures, above all other Writings, have met on one Hand, but a much more fatal and unfair one from that of the other; which is a second Observation I propose not unworthy your Notice, is, from those they too generally are used with, in their Examination and Scrutiny into them, who are in no Degree disqualified to search, and therefore the most likely, without Divine Interposition, to overthrow them.

Men, who have made themselves Masters of Languages in order to pervert them; familiar with the sacred Pages and Passages, only to confound and perplex them; and, in short, taken no less Pains, and been no less industrious to inform themselves, than an unaccountable, diabolical Pleasure to mislead others.

When their critical Remarks and Observations were shewn to be as idle as false, as distant from Truth as dissonent

SERM. VI.

to good Manners, due from every one to all Performances, but more especially to Writings that could shew the least Pretence to Divine Original, by those who had an equal Advantage of Learning, and a better Share of Grace, to defend them; then they but too successfully endeavoured to subvert the Authority of the *whole*, by finding out, and representing some *seeming* inconsistent *particular* Relations, and exposing them with all their Art and Cunning; or rather, more wilfully misrepresenting them in the Languages of the Vulgar, more effectually to corrupt the Principles and darken the Understandings of the Ignorant and Unlearned. They treated the Text no less *unfairly*, than the Author *irreverently*; but, as they shewed so little Respect to the one, there is no Cause to wonder they did so much Injustice to the other.

Instances of this, here again, are likewise too numerous, as well as those from illiterate Heads, to be recounted; wherefore I shall, at this Time, neither trouble you or myself, with taking Notice of any more of them, than what immediately concern and relate to that Passage in Scrip-

ture

ture I have chosen for my Text, and the Passage I shall endeavour to clear from Obscurity, and defend from Inconsistency. SERM. VI.

This Passage then, I must say, is no less ignorantly misunderstood by one Set of Men, than wilfully and designedly perverted by another; both of them tending, though both not equally intentionally so, to reflect upon the Veracity of God. The former little understand, that many Speeches and Prophecies in Scripture are no more than parabolical Representations, as this in particular before us; and therefore, not to be taken or understood in a literal Sense, thereby necessarily and unavoidably leading themselves and others into various and endless Errors and Mistakes; the latter only own their Knowledge of this, when a parabolical Evasion can be wrested to serve their Turn, and by that Means deceive many.

But to come to a right Understanding of this Place, let us fairly examine the Particulars, and then see whether there is any Reason for such Objections as are generally raised.

I shall be as brief in that Historical Part, which it will not be improper to

SERM. VI. relate, as I can, and then proceed to *Micaiah*'s final Anſwer.

Ahab, King of *Iſrael*, was not a little deſirous of recovering out of the Hands of the King of *Syria Ramoth-Gilead*, which, indeed, was unjuſtly detained from him by that King. A favourable Opportunity offered itſelf for obtaining a ſeaſonable Addition to his own Forces; for *Jehoſhaphat*, King of *Judah*, who had married his eldeſt Son to *Ahab*'s Daughter, was now come to *Samaria* to ſee him: At this Interview between the two Kings, *Iſrael* invited *Judah* to go with him to the Siege of *Ramoth-Gilead*, and the latter conſented. *Judah* being unwilling to undertake any Enterprize of this Nature, without Divine Approbation, requeſts of the King of *Iſrael* to conſult the Prophets concerning the Event of this their intended Expedition. In Compliance to his Requeſt, *Ahab* calls together about 400 Prieſts of the Goddeſs *Aſtarte*, who immediately, one and all, aſſured him of Succeſs. But *Jehoſhaphat* was not ſatiſfied with their Anſwer, but wanted to know whether there was not a *Prophet* of the Lord of whom he might enquire?

After

After some Difficulty one was found, and after some Persuasion and Entreaty, admitted into the Presence of these two confederate Kings.

The Messenger that found and conducted *Micaiah*, the Prophet of the Lord, had told him by the Way, what great Success the Priests of the Goddess *Astarte* had promised *Ahab*, and begged of him to join in the same satisfactory Answer.

Accordingly when he came to the Kings, the King of *Israel* directly asked him, and from his having primarily consulted such improper Oracles, and from the Answer he had returned him, we may reasonably conclude, in such an insulting Manner, and with such an Air of Contempt, as rendered the ironical Reply every Way suitable to the haughty Enquiry. *Shall we go*, says he, *against* Ramoth-Gilead *to Battle*, or *shall we forbear? And he answered him, Go, and prosper; for the Lord shall deliver it into the Hand of the King.* Ironical Answer, I say; for I must, in a few Words, beg Leave to clear up this Answer from all seeming Inconsistency, that I may not leave any thing by the Way liable to Misconstruction,

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tion, or Mistake. For even here the Criticks, or Knowing Ones, would assert, *Micaiah* had told the King a Falsity, wilfully and knowingly.

Micaiah then had, as I before observed to you, been acquainted by the Messenger of the unanimous Consent of the Priests, in pronouncing Success to *Ahab* in this his Expedition, though he needed no such Information; and he was likewise sensible of the great Indignity put upon, not only himself, but upon the Lord, whose Prophet he was, in making a prior Application to them, and also no less unacquainted, as a *Prophet*, with what *Sarcasms* and *Taunts* he had been represented as a *morose ill-boding* Person to the King of *Judah*; nay, and as one that *Israel* had professed an absolute Hatred to, for prophesying no Good concerning him, but Evil, and therefore determined rather to give Ear to them, who out of an obsequious, but treacherous Adulation, had returned an Answer more agreeable to his Inclination, than any Regard they had to Truth; wherefore he also makes a parellel Promise of Success, but after such a manner as plainly intimated it was as much

much contrary to his Meaning, as the Priest's Protestations were past their Power of fulfilling. *Go, and prosper.* Consult but the Text, (for, when properly and judiciously consulted, Scripture undoubtedly is the best Interpreter of itself,) and you will more plainly discern the Truth of this: *Ahab* you will find, perhaps, conscious to himself, that he was every Way undeserving of God's Favours, and sensible after what manner this Answer was returned, (for let me remind you, the very same Words will bear different Meanings, according to the different Ways and Tones they are expressed in,) did not give Credit to it himself, but passionately demands a more peremptory and express Reply:——*How many times shall I adjure thee*, says he, *that thou tell me nothing but that which is true, in the Name of the Lord?* I say, *Micaiah* returned him this ironical Reply, first, as being an Enemy to the Lord himself, and consequently to his faithful Servants, and yet, though entreated, daring to consult, and at the same time insult his Prophet: Secondly, for preferring the Priests of a Heathen Deity, in going first to them to consult, and not

unlikely

SERM. VI. unlikely pray for a prosperous Expedition; not that he meant this as an Answer which he would literally stand to, as a few Lines after sufficiently demonstrate; or as any other, but a seasonable Sneer upon the King's impious Presumption, on the one Hand, and the fulsome Flatteries of his favourite smooth-tongued Priests, on the other; who were always as willing and obedient to tell him an agreeable Lye, as unable if disposed, not daring, if informed, to reveal to him a necessary, if unwelcome Truth.

Hence then, 'tis evident *Micaiah*'s Answer, rightly apprehended, was rather a Prohibition, than any real Encouragement, to go to the Siege, and as such received by *Ahab*; and which, in other Words, may be rendered thus; Since thou art rather determined to gratify than listen to Advice, to give Ear to Flattery and Adulation, than attend to Truth, *follow* the Directions of thy Prophets, who have beforehand so positively and unanimously assured thee of Success, and go to Battle, and let thy *dear-bought* Experience, which alone can, convince thee of the Truth of their Predictions.

This

This clears *Micaiah* from asserting any thing like a Falsity; and in this Sense *Ahab* understood him, and therefore immediately appeals to him, in the Name of the Lord, to tell him nothing but that which is true; which he no sooner did, than the Prophet made him that beautiful *parabolical* Answer we now come to consider:

And he said, I saw all Israel *scattered upon the Hills, as Sheep that have not a Shepherd: And the Lord said, These have no Master, let them return every Man to his House in Peace. And the King of* Israel *said unto* Jehoshaphat, *Did not I tell thee, that he would prophesy no Good concerning me, but Evil? And he said, Hear thou therefore the Word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his Throne, and all the Host of Heaven standing by him on his Right-hand, and on his Left. And the Lord said, Who shall persuade* Ahab, *that he may go up and fall at* Ramoth-Gilead? *And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner. And there came forth a Spirit, and stood before the Lord, and said, I will persuade him. And the Lord said unto him, Wherewith? And he said,*

I will

SERM. VI. *I will go forth, and I will be a Lying Spirit in the Mouth of all his Prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also: Go forth, and do so. Now therefore behold, the Lord hath put a Lying Spirit in the Mouth of all thy Prophets, and the Lord hath spoken Evil concerning thee.*

I shall beg Leave to lay before you the many gross Absurdities that must unavoidably attend a literal Construction of the Prophet's Speech, which will sufficiently demonstrate, that it ought to be taken in a parabolical Sense.

Let me observe to you, Part of it is not to be taken in a literal, and Part in a parabolical Sense, but the whole, and then these following Contradictions may fairly and undeniably be deduced. And first——The Lord is represented, sitting on his Throne, with the Host of Heaven standing by him, as consulting with them, who should undertake this Office, and wherewith they proposed to prevail.

Now can any Person be imagined to entertain so low, so mean, so unworthy, nay, so inconsistent an Opinion of the Deity as to conceive it in Consultation with

with any *Created* Being? Can any one be so ignorant, as to conclude Omniscience could ask Counsel, or Omnipotence want Assistance? And yet so groveling, so unadequate an Idea of the Almighty must this Speech convey, was it to be construed according to the Letter, and all, who in that Light so consider it, must agreeably thereto conceive of him, nay, and still entertain more servile than Pagan Opinions, as will appear upon a little closer Examination. For alas! what was this *Grand* Consultation about, and this *Mighty* Counsel given therein? Why only to deceive that easily deluded Creature, Man; and the Method proposed, that weak and insufficient one——a Lye.

This must be passing a high Compliment upon the Prophets of the Goddess to conclude an Angel of the Lord only could tempt them to prophesy falsely, and an higher upon *Ahab*, to say God must be at a Loss, without consulting more subtle and knowing ones, to impose upon them, that they thereby might be able to delude him; but how contemptible a Notion of God it must beget in the Breasts of those who thus read

and

SERM. VI. and apply it, Respect and Reverence will not suffer me to endeavour to describe.

Thus to interpret Scripture, would be to make it more difficult for God himself to impose upon a wicked King to go to meet his too well-deserved Doom, than for his Adversary to pay it him when imposed upon; to necessitate the Almighty to the Assistance of a Lye, to bring about what infinite Justice, without doing Violence to no less infinite Mercy, might justly require; *dictate* to Omniscience to seek for Advice, and *force* Omnipotence to look about for Redress.

Again——Another Consequence no less derogatory to the Almighty must also ensue, were we to admit of a literal Construction.

The Creator must not only be granted to want, and give in to the Advice of his Creatures, but also to stand in Need of their Aid and Assistance to pursue and execute it: Hereby is he made lower than the Angels in soliciting their Counsel, and, in Reality, weaker than Man, in appearing to be at a Loss for any more powerful to controul him.

But

But this is not all, though this is contradictory enough to satisfy any unprejudiced and reasonable Reader; for, according to this Method of interpreting and explaining Scripture, God is not only degraded so low as to be beholding to the Advice and Assistance of his own Agents, but likewise to submit to the Success of a Lye, to put it into Execution.

This is not only making him impotent enough to seek the Service of an Angel of Light, but wicked enough also to accept of that of an Angel of Darkness, to compleat and effect it. In short, it is to make *Astarte*'s Priests too wise to be imposed upon by any less powerful Being than an Angel of the Lord; and *Ahab* Proof against the Suggestions of the Almighty, and yet weak enough to be defended by the Promises of those who were themselves dictated and deceived by Impostors.

Here then will I stop, and represent to you, in as few Words as I can, how we may understand and explain this Passage, and at the same Time neither be offended at the Words of the holy inspired

SERM. VI.

ſpired Penman, nor do Violence to that moſt ſacred Attribute of God, his Truth.

The *Jews*, and indeed all other Nations, generally conceived a Notion of God, that he was a King, ſeated on his Throne; and that good and bad Angels, the one ſtanding on his Right Hand, and the other on his Left, were appointed the Executioners of his Orders, either to reward or puniſh his Subjects: And as Princes and Potentates upon Earth do generally nothing of Moment, without adviſing with their Counſel, or chief Officers; ſo the Prophet repreſents Almighty God, as deliberating with his Heavenly Courtiers what Courſe he had beſt to take, in order to bring *Ahab* to Deſtruction. But then, this is only to be underſtood as if the Prophet had no other Way, as in Reality he had not, of bringing down Spiritual and Divine Things to the Meaſure of human and ſhallow Capacities, than by deſcribing them by apt Alluſions and lively Repreſentations; and not to give Room for ſuch a crude Conception of the Divine Providence, as to think that he, who is the Fountain of all Power and Wiſdom, needed to adviſe

vise with any Being, or can be at a Loss for any Expedient, to accomplish his Ends; or that he who is both Truth and Holiness itself, should ever send a Lying Spirit, which would be to confound all Inspiration, and to make the Imputation of Error redound upon himself. SERM. VI.

If you thus understand the Prophet, it is a beautiful Allusion, a lively Description of the Prophet's to *Ahab*, of a Decree passed, which he, as an Embassador of Heaven, was commissioned to discover, neither betraying his own Trust, or tainting the Integrity of that God, who is a God with whom there is no Variableness, neither Shadow of Turning.

Many are the Inferences that might be drawn from this Account, but Time will not admit me to make any more than this short one.

If *Ahab* was tempted by any Evil Spirit, avoid the Sins that made him liable to that Temptation, and be assured, unless you by your Provocations tempt God, that you shall never be tempted of the Lord. *Amen.*

SERMON VII.

Christ's Assertion explained.

MATTHEW X. 34.

Think not that I am come to send Peace upon Earth: I came not to send Peace, but a Sword.

SERM. VII.

WHO, that either considers the humane, tender, and affectionate Disposition and Temper of our Blessed Saviour, or the peaceable and amicable Tendency of Christianity, would not at the first Sight be surprized, that either the Author should come to promote, or the Religion by such a one established, should occasion the contrary Effects he might reasonably conclude would be produced from such Causes?

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The distinguishing Characteristick, in another Place, we are informed, was to be *Love*; and yet here even Christ himself assures his Disciples, that Malice and Envy, Hatred and Revenge, nay, Persecution and Death, should attend the Propagation of it! Few, methinks, would look upon this as any great Encouragement or Engagement, to embrace it; but that if this was to be the Consequence, the only Way to live at Ease, and in Peace, would be to reject Christianity. In other Passages in Scripture you read, that the great Distinction that should singularize Christ's Followers from the rest of the World, should be that remarkable *Love* and Unanimity, that should exist and display itself among them; and none could be his Followers, but those only who professed his Religion; notwithstanding here, you see, how different a Consequence he himself foretels should follow the Profession of it. It countenances no Divisions, encourages no Variances, allows of no Animosities, nor tolerates any Disturbances: But on the contrary, it is calculated to heal up all Breaches, to make up all Grievances, to terminate all Heats, and

and pacify all Quarrels. Retaliation, for Injuries done, or Cruelties committed, was both permitted, and also accounted agreeable to the Law; but Christianity was not only to clear it from the false Glosses, and Pharisaical Comments which then obscured it, but likewise to bring it to its Maturity, which as then might be supposed only in its Infancy. This we may learn from our Blessed Saviour's Sermon in the Mount; wherein he plainly tells us, he was *not come*, nor was it the Intent of his Religion, to *destroy* either *the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfil* the one, and render perfect every Deficiency in the other; or, to fulfil the Typical or Ceremonial Part, and to compleat the Natural or Moral. The Typical or Ceremonial Part, every one the least conversant in Scripture must be too sensible, he, to a Tittle, fulfilled, to be here informed, nor indeed is there much Occasion to acquaint you, how he perfected and compleated the Natural or Moral. However, by Way of Digression permit me to instance it to you in a few Emendations, or Additions. I shall beg Leave briefly to mention six Particulars,

SERM. VII. wherein he has enlarged upon the Laws of old. And *first* I shall begin with that against *Murder*, or the sixth Commandment, *viz. Thou shalt do no Murder*; but as he here expresses himself, *It was said by them of old Time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill, shall be in Danger of the Judgment.* But what does our Saviour add? *I say unto you*, that not only he who shall kill, but he also who shall causelessly *be angry with his Brother, shall be in Danger of the Judgment*; hereby making Anger and Passion, under the Evangelical Law, equally liable to the Censure of him who alone knoweth the Secrets of all Hearts, as Murder is, under the Mosaical, to the Sentence and Judgments of their Courts. Then he proceeds to the other Steps which gradually lead on to the Breach, and finally terminate in the actual Transgression of this Commandment; all along shewing them the nearer the Approach, the greater the Danger of Commission, and the severer the Affliction from the Hands of Divine Justice. This, one would conclude, the surest Method to guard against the Violation of this Law, when even

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the *first* Attempt was thus expressed to be so criminal: For if a Person is so much Master of himself, as to avoid ever being *causelessly angry*, or in a Passion, there is little Danger he will ever be hurried on to the Perpetration of wilful Murder.

The next Part of the Law he enlarges upon, is that of *Adultery*, or the Seventh Commandment. *Ye have heard*, says he, *that it was said by them of old Time, Thou shalt not commit Adultery. But I say unto you, whosoever looketh on a Woman* with unchaste Desires, and immodest Intentions, lascivious Eyes and unlawful Inclinations, *is guilty of Adultery* in his own Mind, and in the Judgment of God, though he has not Opportunity to commit the Fact. As a Person has advanced the first Step towards *Homicide*, who causelessly harbours Anger and Malice in his Breast against his Brother, so has a Man begun the Act of *Adultery* in his own Heart, whose Mind is no longer chaste, and whose Eyes cease to behold with Modesty. In short, Anger and Lust, are both, for the same Reason, thus strictly commanded to be suppressed; the one leading not more directly to Murder,

SERM. VII. than the other to Adultery; it is only a Dread of the Punishment of the Law, that hinders the former, and the Want of Opportunity, that prevents the latter.

The same may be said in Praise of our Saviour's Amendment of, or Addition to the Law, in this Instance, as was in the other: For few would be likely to be tempted to commit Adultery, if none entertained any vicious Inclinations.

In the *third* Place, the Law saith, *Whosoever shall put away his Wife, let him give her a Writing of Divorcement: But I say unto you,* this was contrary to the original Design of God, but only connived at to the *Jews*, because of the Hardness of their Hearts, and to prevent greater and more dangerous Evils. From henceforth, therefore, *whosoever shall put away his Wife, and marry another, excepting only for the Cause of Adultery, shall be accounted guilty of causing,* both her that is put away, and him that shall afterwards marry her, *to commit Adultery.*

Fourthly, *ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old Time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thy Oaths. But I say unto you, Swear not at*

all,

all, i. e. not in your common Conversation: For it is evident, our Saviour does not here prohibit solemnly swearing to any Truth before a Magistrate, which, was it either to our present Design, or did Necessity require it, I could easily prove; but what he here means, is, Invoke not the Name of God upon every light Occasion; *but let your Conversation* be always attended with that Truth and Sincerity, that your Word may be received as an Oath.

Fifthly, *Ye have heard that it hath been said, An Eye for an Eye, and a Tooth for a Tooth*; that is, as I before observed to you, that the Law allowed Retaliation of Evil; and that Injury should be returned for Injury: *But I say unto you, return not Evil for Evil.* But if any Man injure you, and you cannot be redressed by Just and Christian Authority; submit rather to the Injustice, than go about to right yourselves by Revenge or Retaliation. Not that Christ can possibly be here supposed to enjoin us not to resist Robbers and Murderers, but is here supposed to speak only of smaller Oppressions.

Sixthly,

SERM. VII. Sixthly, and lastly, *Ye have heard it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy Neighbour and hate thine Enemy: But I say unto you, Love* not only those who love you, but even those also who are your greatest *Enemies:* Speak well, not only of those who speak well of you, but also of those who revile and curse you; be kind not only to those who are kind to you, but even to those who also hate and reproach you; and pray not only for those who are friendly to you, but even for those who injure and persecute you: Remember God sendeth his Rain on the Just and the Unjust.

I have thus briefly run over these few Amendments, not only to shew, how our Saviour might justly say he came to complete and perfect the Law, but also, that you might the clearer understand how, probably speaking, such a Religion as he instituted, was unlikely to produce such opposite Effects. A Religion, in the first Place, that was so far from countenancing the shedding of Blood, that it strictly prohibited the giving Way to, or indulging those thitherto tending Passions of Anger and Revenge; so far

from

from admitting any Thing that did but resemble the Breach of the seventh Commandment, that even all lewd and lascivious Thoughts and Looks were condemned. Again, to preserve the sacred Pledge of Love in Matrimony inviolable, so far from admitting, upon any frivolous or momentous Account, one only excepted, to render that null and void, that it ordered nothing should separate, or *put asunder those whom God hath joined together*; for that such Separation was equivalent to actual Adultery: A Religion so averse to Perjury, that it forbids all Profaneness; and so far from dispensing with the Law of Retaliation, that it even commands to put up with real Injuries, rather than seek to redress them by any such Anti-christian Means; and lastly, one that is so express against cherishing or indulging Hatred or Ill-will, that universal Love and Charity, Benevolence and Affection, are indiscriminately inforced, to Foes as well as Friends, to Adversaries as well as Advocates: In short, a Religion, in every Respect, resembling its Divine Author, who is justly stiled *the Prince of Peace, and God of Love.*

Few,

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Few, I say, would imagine that such a Religion as this should have been productive of any Thing but Harmony and Concord, Unity and Unanimity: But our Saviour, who was no less a Prophet than a Priest, too well foreknew, what Enemies this mildest and meekest, most reasonable and beneficial Religion of his, would have to contest with, and that if it did not first take up the Sword of the *Flesh* to make its Way, it would be obliged to draw the Sword of the *Spirit* in its own Defence. This he plainly intimates to his Disciples, in his Charge to them, in these Words; *Behold, I send you forth, as Sheep in the Midst of Wolves; be ye therefore wise as Serpents, and harmless as Doves.* The World to be converted, and brought over to embrace his Religion, he very fitly compares to *Wolves*, and that Furiousness to devour, Watchfulness to surprize, and Greediness to confound and dismay, besides the Art to delude and decoy, all along too manifest in it, has justified the Similitude; and shewn that the Wisdom or Subtilty of the *Serpent* was no less necessary to guard against the Wiles and Attacks, Surprizes and Ambuscades,

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Allurements and treacherous Overtures of the Enemy, than the Harmlesness or Innocency of the *Dove*, to gain it over to, and enamour it with the Amiableness of Christianity. Innocency alone would only have served to expose them a more easy and defenceless Prey to the rapacious *Maw*; and Subtilty or Wisdom, without it, might indeed have taught them Self-Preservation, but would scarcely have prompted them to any thing more; but granting it might sometimes have instructed them to have over-reached or circumvented the Enemy, yet it would rather have inclined them to take the Advantage by their utter Destruction, than make them Friends by a gentle Conversion. In short, Wisdom then was, and now is, no less requisite to oppose and confute, answer and reply to all Gainsayers and Disturbers of Peace, than Innocency to charm and continue such when made Converts. Innocency may happen to have a strong Influence upon some Tempers and Dispositions itself; but then it will only be upon such as are naturally mild and gentle, and every Way resembling it, which is far from being the most common in the World;

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World; wherefore this Wisdom is absolutely necessary to be annexed to it, in order to dispute and convince, where the other alone is incapable of courting and ingratiating itself to work out their Conformity.

This Caution of our Saviour's will always be timely and in Season, and perhaps never more so than at present. If we have not so many *Wolves* to contest it with as the Apostles had, we have what is as dangerous, if not more so, *Wolves in Sheeps Clothing*; and if that *Sword* which our Saviour said, he came to send upon Earth, be not just now drawn among us, 'tis not long since that it was sheathed. Sectaries are sprung up, not offended at the Name of Christians; and yet such as not only endeavour to sap and undermine the Church of Christ, but even to disprove his Divinity: All disagreeing among themselves, and yet all united against the Truth.

Hence have arisen those Divisions and Variances foretold by our Saviour; and this will continue an inexhaustible Fountain of such similar Errors, 'till Time shall be no more; unless the Spring from whence

whence it is supplied be providentially dried up. Whilst these strange Disagreements, too common amongst us, are either continued or connived at, countenanced or permitted, what Wonder is it that we should behold a *Man at Variance with his Father, or the Daughter against the Mother?* To offer to *compel* Men to be of one Mind, I know by many would be loudly called *Persecution*; and as there is something of *Popery* (a Word more universally, in these our Days, dreaded than understood) in the Name Persecution; Compulsion, and (by an unfair Deduction from thence) even a necessary Restraint is not to be mentioned: However, thus far I will venture to assert, that as long as Men are permitted thus entirely to follow the Bent of their own idle Imaginations, or left at large to new model, *or new mould* Religion as they please, the Mischiefs of a pretended, nay, a real Persecution, will not half equal those of so wicked or dangerous a *Toleration*. Who is there able to enumerate all the Evils and Disturbances, Wickedness and Debaucheries, (not to mention Murders and Suicides,) that have in our own Memories, and under our own

SERM. VII.

own Eyes, occurred, from running after, and attending a Set of enthusiastick itinerant Preachers? Men, who have perverted the very Gospel of Peace into the Word of Confusion; and either driven many poor deluded Souls into absolute *Despair*, or (which is scarce determinable whether to dread most) into downright *Presumption*; one Part concluding they cannot, however desirous, arrive to that Perfection, without which there is no Salvation; and the other no less wickedly, that they cannot, however sinful, after an imaginary Regeneration, incur to themselves Damnation!

The Dangers that may be apprehended from other Sects, not disowning Christianity, are likewise no less numerous, nor less fatal: Some we have of late very sensibly felt; so sensibly, that we cannot truly say we are even now perfectly recovered. These, it is true, have been known and distinguished by their Names and Appellations longer amongst us; and they are many of them such as would incline Men to conclude, they were at a greater Loss to find out, than their Religion; and, at last, that

they

they had ironically nick-named themselves; but there are some who glory in their Shame, otherwise I think the former may as justly plead Antiquity from their Tenets, and almost from the Absurdity of them too, as any of the other. They have all been, and whilst suffered to continue, and gain Proselytes, ever will be, equally Enemies to his Church, whose Disciples they would persuade you they are; and if it were possible that they could multiply their Principles, and diversify them also, equal to their Members; and how far they have advanced that Way, they themselves only know; I say, could every Member have a distinct Principle, and thereby merit a different Name, yet, upon Occasion, and whenever any Advantage was likely to be gained, they would one and all be unanimous in opposing and overthrowing that Church, whose greatest Fault, perhaps, is, that of conniving at this.

There are others, indeed, who neither deserve or desire the Appellation of *Christians*; and yet, who without any Scruple or Hesitation, are admitted into the Society and Fellowship of the above-mentioned,

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SERM. VII. mentioned, whenever Religion is to be attacked, or the House of God to be assaulted. The Principles of these Men are too absurd to be exposed, and too wicked to be repeated, and their Practices but too consonant thereto, and yet so highly countenanced, and so powerfully recommended, that I shall forbear saying any more of either, lest, what I intended as a serious Admonition, may be misconstrued into an invective *Libel!*

To conclude: Our Saviour undoubtedly foresaw these Schisms and Divisions, and the unhappy and dismal Effects they were sure to produce, and therefore, in the Words of my Text, assures his Disciples, whatever contrary Notions they might entertain, that he was not come to send, or that the Consequence of his Appearance, as he knew how Things would turn out, would not be *Peace, but a Sword:* However, let not any of these Schismaticks, or Peace-breakers, and their Adherents, presume that it will be any Mitigation of their Sins, because such are foretold must come; but rather let them apply to themselves what he elsewhere says of Offences; namely, that it

was

was *impossible but Offences* should *come*, and notwithstanding then adds, *But Wo unto him through whom they come!* SERM. VII.

Secondly, let not any one be discouraged or dismayed at these unavoidable and unavailable Disturbances, being well assured that though Victory seems sometimes more outwardly inclined in Favour of Faction and Disorder, than of Reason and Religion, yet that the former shall never totally triumph over the Ruins of the latter, or the latter be entirely and constantly led Captive by the former. The Church has had many and wonderful Deliverances, but not without her Sons joining their utmost Endeavours with *Divine Concurrence*: And though at this Time, the Noise of a *Coalition* is a little hushed up and abated, (the only probable human Method of overturning her;) yet, if an Opportunity can be laid hold on, for which many are constantly upon the Watch, (as daily Advertisements abundantly inform us) it is easy to guess *what* a Religion is likely to be established, when those chiefly, who are loud enough in proclaiming their *Indifference* to any, are to be the Regulators or *Trimmers* of it!

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Finally then, if Afflictions ſhould befal us, and Calamities ſurround us, and we are ſore lett and hindered in running the Way that is ſet before us, let us, in Conformity to our moſt excellent Liturgy, with Faith and full Aſſurance, addreſs ourſelves to the Throne of Grace, and beg that God would *mercifully aſſiſt our Prayers that we make before* him, *in all our Troubles and Adverſities, whenſoever they oppreſs us; and graciouſly hear us, that thoſe Evils, which the Craft and Subtilty of the Devil or Man worketh againſt us, be brought to nought, and by the Providence of* his *Goodneſs, they may be diſperſed; that we,* his *Servants, being hurt by no Perſecutions, may evermore give Thanks unto* him *in* his *Holy Church through* Jeſus Chriſt *our Lord:* To whom with the Father and the Holy Ghoſt be aſcribed all Honour, Power, Praiſe, Might, Majeſty and Dominion, now and for evermore.

Amen.

St. MARY'S,

Oxon.

SERMON

SERMON VIII.

Natural Reason insufficient to discover Divine Truth.

Acts XVII. Part of Verse 22.

To the unknown God.

THIS is the Title St. *Paul* found upon an Altar in the City of *Athens*, so remarkably famous for Learning, and the chief Resort of learned Men: It was at that Time the Academy of the World, and the only Place to polish and complete the Man: There the Arts and Sciences were cultivated and encouraged, and every one, whose Circumstances would permit, was sure to visit that Seat of the Muses, Nursery of Philosophy, and School of all Accomplishments. The two reigning Sects then in vogue, were the *Epicureans*

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reans and the Stoicks, Philosophers equally opposite to one another, and as distant from that Light brought into the World by the Gospel. The one, namely, the *Epicureans*, held, that the supreme Felicity of Man consisted in Pleasures; and though they allowed the Being of a God, yet they maintained, though he was an immortal blessed Being, yet that he had no Affairs of his own to take care of, and that he was above taking Notice of those of others. The Stoicks, Followers of *Zeno*, couched their Morality in Paradoxes: As, That a wise Man is void of all Passion or Perturbation of Mind: That Pain is no real Evil; but that a wise Man is happy in the Midst of the severest Torture: That a wise Man is always the same, and always joyful: That none but a wise Man is free; all others are Slaves: That all wise Men are great: That none but a wise Man is rich: That all Things are a wise Man's, who is contented with himself: That wise Men are the only Friends, and the only Lovers: That nothing ever happens to a wise Man beyond Expectation: That all Virtues are inviolably connected together: That all good

Things

Things are equal, and equally to be desired; and that Goodness admits of no Increase or Diminution. SERM. VIII.

These were the Sentiments of human Reason, not altogether unassisted by Revelation, and the Result of close Study and unwearied Application. And these Opinions were not more tenaciously held by the Authors and first Broachers of them, than greedily embraced by the Pupils of the Age.

There were, indeed, other Sects of as unaccountable Persuasions; but it would be needless for me, either to enumerate them, or to repeat to you their Tenets; but they were all, as human Reason ever will be when elevated with its own Sufficiency, equally distant from revealed Truth. However, every Philosopher had his Followers, and every new Opinion wanted not Numbers to receive it; for you find it was the Humour of the Times, and that Place in particular, to be chiefly delighted in telling or hearing some new Thing.

As to their Religion and Worship, you may easily imagine there could be no great Regularity in them, when even the In-

SERM. VIII. scription upon their Altar sufficiently demonstrated they were ignorant of the Object of it; but then it proves they had not, as now is the Case, laid Worship and Religion aside. This Ignorance of the Deity could not possibly be imputed to any Deficiency in the Understanding, or to any Want of Application to Study, their natural Parts were as bright as any Age either before or since has been adorned with, and their Contemplation was only equalled by their Curiosity. Reason prompted to them that one great Truth, That there is a God; but it never did point out, or clearly enough discover the true one; and therefore could not be a sufficient Guide to them in the Direction and Discharge of their Duty and Worship: And we have as much Reason to conclude that the modern Unbelievers would have had no higher or better Notions of a Deity, had they been equally Strangers to, and as much unacquainted with that Revelation they so industriously endeavour to depreciate and disprove. This imperfect Knowledge of God was sure to occasion as great Imperfections in their Systems of Morality; and though Reason, improved by Study

and

and Experience, and some extraordinary Genuius's have hit upon many excellent Precepts, and shewn this Brightness; yet they have very frequently discovered as much Obscurity, and always, in Search after the Nature of the Divine Existence, or indeed their own, manifested absolute Darkness. To prove this by Quotation, would be in this Place unnecessary; and this one Instance before us is as strong a Proof of what I have asserted, as Thousands—*To the unknown God.*

Uncommon and unwearied as their Search after Knowledge was, quick and penetrating as their Genius's were, yet we find they were not ashamed to confess their Ignorance even upon their Altars; but by their Altars we find they wanted not a Spirit of Devotion. The Case is now reversed; they rightly concluded Worship and Adoration was due to the Deity, though they were ignorant of the true God; the Men of these Days, to whom that God they ignorantly worshipped is clearly revealed, deny the Necessity of it. They, indeed, were religious without a God, and these are irreligious with one.

Here

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Here we cannot be said to appeal to an ignorant Age, in Respect to human Learning, to a Place either undistinguished, or but trivial for Knowledge, or to Men of common or ordinary Parts: And this should be an undeniable Argument against the Sufficiency of unassisted Reason. For tho' a *Chandler* or a *Woolston* has clearer Notions of a Deity, or better Sentiments of Morality than a *Zeno*, or an *Epicurus*; yet is this owing to that Light the one received from that Revelation the other was deprived of, and not to any Superiority of Parts or Understanding common to them all. Had *Epicurus* been as evidently ascertained of the Omnipotency, or Omnipresency of a God, and of the Immortality of the Soul, he would not have fixed the supreme Felicity of Man in Pleasures and Sensuality; nor concluded the Affairs of this World too large to be troublesome to Infinite Power, or too little to escape Infinite Knowledge: And had *Zeno* been rightly informed of an all-wise and just Providence, he would not have cried up so mightily a Kind of Indifference, or rather Insensibility. But these, and many other eminent Philosophers, Men who have

have spent all, or the greatest Part of their Time, in painful and laborious Enquiries after Truth, and whom we may safely conclude as great Masters of Reason as any of our modern Rationalists, are Instances how little Man is capable of Discovering in Divine Truths, without Divine Assistance.

Well, but let us suppose, we have clear Discoveries enough of God, and manifest Proof of an all-ruling Providence, and at the same time allow, what never can be proved, that we have not arrived at this Knowledge by the Help of Revelation; we must likewise remember, we have now some clearer Notions commonly prevailing, of a future State; it matters not how we came by them, for Scripture at present is out of the Question. The Enquiry will be, What does Reason tell us will be the Consequence of a future State? Are we there to be rewarded according to our Behaviour here, or are all our Offences to be cancelled, and all to be equally happy? Few Men would choose to face the last Tribunal upon the first Terms; and none, I believe, are so unreasonable as to rely upon the latter.

There

SERM. VIII. There are not many so confident as to stand the Test upon their own Innocence; and who is so absurd as to reverse the Scripture Doctrine, and say the Wages of Sin is Life? Besides, if our Virtue is only to be rewarded with a proportionable Degree of Happiness, the best of Men will not have much to claim, and the Generality of Mankind will be quite excluded any Share of Felicity. But even this, upon Arguments founded only on Reason, is merely Conjecture, all Uncertainty; and when Man has so many present Enjoyments agreeable to corrupted, weak Nature, it will have little Influence to prevent him embracing them: And if he has no better a Support when Age renders them disagreeable, Reflection will then render that intolerable. It may not unlikely then confront God's Mercy with his Justice, and his Goodness with his Purity, and have him much more to fear, than to hope.

Revelation has discovered this unknown State, as clearly as the unknown God; for that was it which brought Life and Immortality to Light. Let Man pretend to what Certainty he pleases of the Soul's future

future Existence, before Scripture cleared and confirmed it, the utmost he could do, was to say, such a Thing might be and to wish it. Reason must tell him that a less Duration than Eternity, and a less Degree of Happiness than Infinite, would more than recompence all its best Services, and therefore it could plead for neither; but Revelation has ascertained us of this important Truth, and exhibited to us a Mediator and Redeemer, whose Death and Sufferings render us Objects of both. This we must defend and maintain, and build our Faith upon, otherwise we may with the *Athenians* as well set up our Altars to the Unknown God. The Depravity of Human Nature speaks itself, and prevents me shewing the Expediency of a Mediator, and at this Time I shall only tell the *Arrian*, *Socinian*, or *Sabellian*, that Scripture is plainly and evidently against them, and that to look for Demonstration in Discourses upon the Divinity of the Son, is equally absurd, as to expect it, in declaring the Existence of the Father; for as the Father is Incomprehensible, so is the Son, so is the Holy Ghost. Is then Disbelief

SERM. VIII. belief to be the Consequence of Incomprehension? As well may we stare with open Eyes against the bright Luminary of the World, and deny its Light, because unable to account for the Manner of its Illumination. Why, alas! vain Man may conclude upon the same Account, that God is no where, because he cannot comprehend him every where; as knowing nothing, because he cannot conceive him knowing all Things; or, like these *Athenian* Idolaters, fancy him material, because he had no Idea of Immateriality.

Much more may be said for the religious Heathen, than, if I may be allowed the Expression, for the Christian Infidel. Take me right: The Heathen who has had no Opportunity of hearing or embracing a Revelation, is much more excusable for Idolatry, than he, who has lived where it has been promulgated by Divine Authority, and attested by supernatural Evidence, and enforced by the strongest human Testimony, can be deemed for Infidelity.

This will be an undeniable Proof of the Reasonableness of Religion, that Persons confessedly ignorant of the Deity should

should, notwithstanding, perceive the Necessity of Adoration and Worship: And the Christian Religion does manifest itself by all the Signs and Indications of Divine Institution, to be the only true and real one: There is such Purity in its Precepts, so much Comfort and Satisfaction in its Doctrine, such a Congruity in its Laws, and such Harmony and Unanimity in the Profession of it, as plainly bespeak its Original. It has discovered enough of the Divine Nature, to make Man knowing, without being presumptive; of God's Goodness, to make Man obedient, without being distrustful; of his Power, to procure awful Reverence, without dejecting Fear; and of all his other Attributes, to beget in the Creature that Love and Regard that is due to the Creator.

I am now speaking of Christianity in general, without considering whether this or that Sect is in the Right; tho' such unnatural Breaches and Divisions as are too common amongst us, have given the Enemies no small Advantage. The *Athenian* Spirit of running after and swallowing every Thing that is new, is far from being extinct; and St. *Paul*'s Remark is now as much

verified

SERM. VIII. verified as ever Prophecy was, that the Time should come, when Men would not endure sound Doctrine; but after their own Lust, shall they heap to themselves Teachers, having itching Ears. Spiritual Faction and Pride, says an eminent Writer, and uncharitable Breaches of Christian Unity and Peace, are not such slight Offences, as some Men are willing to think them; since it was owing in a great Measure to these, that the universal Reign of Christ upon Earth was once hindered, and the Accomplishment of the Prophecies in that Respect, deferred to distant Ages. That little Encouragement true Religion meets with among the higher sort, and the Indecency, according to the present Vogue, of being really devout, has opposite Effects upon the lower and more numerous Class of People: Some it has rendered quite desperate, and others zealous, but really without Knowledge. This was the Time for the Enemy to sow his Tares in, and the Divisions amongst us are manifest Signs that he has not slept. Here one does not make himself less ridiculous with his New Birth, than the

Athenian

Athenian did the Altar with his Inscription to the unknown God. This must be Matter of no small Pleasure to the Deist, and Libertine, and from all these various Opinions concerning Religion, he fondly concludes the Unreasonableness of any; the Discords of some, and the Vices of more, give the Enemies of our Faith Courage to attack it; they put Weapons into their Hands, and furnish them with all Manner of Advantages against it.

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Our Saviour's Remark will always hold good, that a House or a Kingdom divided against itself, cannot stand; and though the Folly of Enthusiasm, or the Malice of Infidelity, will never be able to extinguish the Light of the Gospel, ever to shine whilst this World exists, by an eternal irrevocable Decree, yet they may occasion it to be removed to a People better disposed to be directed by it.

It would certainly be better for Religion, if Men were a little intent upon performing their Duty, and less curious in hearing it; were more conformable to the known and established Rules of it, and not so wavering as to be carried about with divers and strange Doctrines,

SERM. VIII. it being, as St. *Paul* obſerves, a good Thing that the Heart be eſtabliſhed.

I will juſt beg Leave to make an Obſervation or two from what has been advanced, and eaſe your Patience. And

First; Natural Reaſon, you find, has always been loſt in Enquiries after Divine Truths, not only among the Vulgar and Unlearned, but even the moſt celebrated Men for all other Kinds of Knowledge: Whatever Diſcoveries Study, and an uncommon Share of Parts Natural and Acquired, might enable them to make in other Things, in which it muſt be confeſſed, they did mightily ſucceed, yet here were they loſt in Conjectures, and only concluded in Wiſhes and May-be's: And though ſome Men now talk more conſiſtently about them, it is not owing to any Diſcoveries of their own, but entirely to thoſe brought to Light by Revelation. If this wanted any further Proof, which one would ſcarce think it did, even this will confirm it. In Countries where this Light is now extinguiſhed, or where it has not ſhone in its proper Luſtre, there will you meet with as much Ignorance of the Deity, as in

Athens

Athens of old; nor will you find it exceeded by any Thing, unless by our Wickedness. They retain, indeed, some Notions of Worship, and some Kind of Devotion prevails; but it is paid, as it formerly was, *to the unknown God.* How Infinite Justice will deal with them, who have not had an Opportunity of embracing the Truth, is not for us to determine; but sure it will be no great Degree of Presumption to conclude, not as he will with those, who have obstinately rejected, and industriously ridiculed the Word of Life.

Secondly; Another Thing let me observe to you, that all the necessary Duties, you are to practise, and all the necessary Truths you are required to believe, are plainly set down; and unless you multiply the one, and presumptuously pry into the other, these will no longer be rendered impracticable, or those incredible. Those who have swerved from the commonly received Opinions, and therefore most probable, either in Point of Practice, or of Faith, have either done it merely out of Opposition, and Spiritual Pride; or out of a Principle

SERM. VIII. destructive of all Religion. Read but the Scriptures with Attention, without dwelling upon Intricacies, or torturing Expressions, and in Essentials you hardly will err: Be constant and devout in your Attendance at the House of Prayer, and learn to set a due Value upon, and that is only rightly to understand, our excellent Liturgy, and your Religion will need no Addition. Confess your Sins with that Humility and Contrition it enjoins; praise God in the Loftiness and Majesty it prescribes. Let the Intercessions be comprehensive of all the Duties, and the Supplications be extended to all the Wants of yourselves and all Mankind, as it has filled them, and you will find this to be a reasonable Service, neither blended with Superstition, nor fraught with Enthusiasm. Be constant and immoveable in this Service, and doubt not but it will finally prepare you for what we are here all Candidates, the Service of him who is the Father of Lights, with whom is no Variableness, neither Shadow of Turning. *Amen.*

SERMON

SERMON IX.

To live the Life, the only Way to die the Death of the Righteous.

NUMBERS XXIII. 10.

Let me die the Death of the Righteous, and let my last End be like his.

TO die the Death of the Righteous, is an End, no less commonly than devoutly to be wished for; but to imitate them in the Purity and Innocence, Uprightness and Integrity of their Lives, the Business of few; and therefore so few are they, who obtain any Thing more, than to form the bare empty Wish. He that does not lead the Life, has no more Reason to expect to die the Death, than he that is enamoured with any Master-

SERM. IX.

SERM. IX. Piece in Building or Painting, and from a Kind of Transport at the Prospect or View, forming a parallel Desire, has to conclude, without Study or Application, he should commence Architect or Limner.

As well may we hope to become Masters of all Sciences and Languages, Proficients in every Accomplishment, and well versed in all Things with a Wish. But alas! he that will reap, must sow; and he that will find, must seek. It is a good Thing not to want an Inclination to be better, but then we must pursue it; and pursue it whilst the Inclination is strong and vigorous, before Temptation has abated and blunted it, and an evil Habit has rendered a State of Indifferency, or Sinfulness, more familiar. If good Intentions are only formed, without being put into Execution, they will only serve to demonstrate our Folly, and display our Weakness; they may, indeed, serve as Colours for Vice to plant its Artillery against; but if we have no better Fortifications to defend our Virtue, she must surrender the Citadel. Too many satisfy themselves with the plausible, but delusive, Hopes of taking up at last, and however

however vain and triflingly, thoughtlesly or offensively, the Days of their Youth, or Maturity, may have been spent, yet their final Act of Life shall vary in every Scene, and their Exit shall be in Peace. But the Transition from Vice to Virtue is not so easy, supposing we were to make no Account of the Uncertainty of Life; and it rarely happens that a Veteran in the Service of Sin, ever gets a Discharge. Nature has in no one Point more plainly discovered to us the Difficulty, I had almost said the Impossibility, of changing long contracted Habits: We have Instances sufficient not only in the Animal but Vegetable Creation, to convince us of this Truth; and we ourselves are living Witnesses to confirm it. Tender Years readily receive any Impression, and tender Plants fall into any Form; Time cannot easily deface the former, or alter the latter. Different Tempers, like different Plants, are likewise to be peculiarly cultivated; this, wants nothing more than Encouragement to further Instruction; that, but little Care to promote its Growth: This stands in Need of Correction, to beget Attention; that must be cramped and

SERM. IX. confined, to mould it into Form: This is to be gradually conducted in the Path of Knowledge; that to be carefully and duly attended: But all this is to be done only whilst the one is tractable, and the other pliable, and small After-Care will be requisite to continue them in a decent Regularity.

Notwithstanding this is really the Case, many without any Reason at all, and others upon some weak Pretences, consume their Youth in a thoughtless, indolent Indifferency, and the Prime of their Years in a free and indulgent Gratification of their unrestrained Passions; and yet all of them presuming their last End may be not unlike the End of the Righteous. And what is this, but in Effect to say, whilst we have a Relish for Vice, and Health and Years afford us an Appetite for the forbidden Fruits, we may continue gathering them; when we are surfeited, or Age has rendered them distasteful, it is Time enough to think of forsaking them; not considering they have all that Time been vitiating their Palate for the Tree of Life. What great Reason have they to expect, that should appear

amiable

amiable in the Sight of old Age, which the Eyes of their Youth could not, or would not, behold with any tolerable Satisfaction; or can they think, Virtue is always so sociable, that she will be ready to join the Company of those grey Hairs, that shunned and avoided, nay! that despised her when their Acquaintance might have been much more agreeable?

Our Intimacy with Virtue, can never be begun too early; for like other Friendships, it will grow firmer by Time, and closer by Familiarity: The mutual Ties that bound this on Earth, shall but serve to hold the indissoluble Knot the faster, when that of all others shall be untied.

To think of making a Beginning, when we must draw towards a Conclusion, and to court an Acquaintance, just as we are going to bid a final Adieu, is but a wrong Method of proceeding; and such is theirs, who only think of embracing Religion a little before unrelenting Death issues out their Summons for the Grave. There is no Opportunity to manifest the Sincerity of the Heart, no Time to try the Integrity of the Mind; the Pretensions may be all feigned or wavering, and such constrained

SERM. IX. constrained Addresses seldom speak real Desires. With what an Eye should any of us look upon a Person in the midst of Prosperity, free and intimate, and caressing with all Fondness our most inveterate Enemies, and forsaken of them only upon the Account of Adversity, coming to us for Relief, with the strongest Professions of Friendship? If we had a Heart so tender as to relieve him, could we be so credulous as to believe him? The Case is pretty parallel; it is not that old Age deserts Vice, but Vice forsakes old Age; and when it can court nothing else with Success, it must pretend to be enamoured with Virtue.

Our Blessed Saviour has, in a most engaging Manner, told us upon what Terms the most obstinate and perverse Sinners may meet with Remission; and to encourage them to return into the Ways of Peace, has mentioned the Joy there will be in Heaven upon their Repentance, and illustrated it with such agreeable Parables, as, one might have thought, would have influenced the most abandoned. But alas! they have perverted the very Design of them, and what should have been,

and

and was intended as a Motive to haſten their Converſion, is now made a Plea for their Deſertion.

The Parables are thoſe of the loſt Sheep, the Piece of Money, and the Prodigal Son; all very perſuaſive. The Reaſon of our Saviour's then delivering them, was, he was in Company with Publicans and Sinners, in order to convert them from the Evil of their Ways; a Work he earneſtly laboured after, at which the Phariſees and Scribes murmured. They looked upon Sinners with ſo much Contempt, and had ſo little Charity for them, out of a falſe Veneration for Religion, and were ſo far from endeavouring or deſiring their Converſion, that to keep Company with them, (and without that, how ſhould they be reclaimed?) was accounted a Crime ſufficient: But to ſhew them their Error, he tells them how agreeable to God it would be, and what Joy in the Preſence of the Angels the Repentance of a Sinner would occaſion. Here was a proper Rebuke for Phariſaical Pride and Self-Sufficiency, for hypocritical Contempt and Cenſure; *I ſay unto you, Phariſees and Scribes, that Joy ſhall be in Heaven over*

one

SERM. IX. *one Sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just Persons,* which need no Repentance. This must touch them home, and shew them the Vanity of their insolent Addresses, and presumptuous Approaches to the Throne of Mercy; *God, I thank thee, that I am not as other Men are*; pleading Merit, and prejudging others, esteeming themselves Persons that had no Occasion for Repentance: For no Doubt our Saviour here intended this as a severe Reproof of their boasted Uprightness and Integrity, whatever further Meaning the Words do likewise contain; and indeed he plainly tells them in another Place, that *they that be whole,* as they always looked upon themselves to be, *needed not a Physician, but they that were sick*; and that he *came not to call the Righteous, but Sinners to Repentance.* But at this Time it would draw me off from my Design, to consider what other Interpretations may be put upon these Words; and therefore I shall only endeavour to shew, that no one ought to conclude from any thing either in this Verse, or the three Parables in the Chapter, that Sinners may proceed with Safety, and at last occasion the Joy

here

here mentioned; but that the ſafeſt Way to die the Death, is to live the Life of the Righteous. SERM. IX.

The firſt Thing liable to delude Men embracing this fond Notion, is, that the Man is ſaid to leave the Ninety and Nine in the Wilderneſs, and to go after that which was loſt until he found it. Now they rightly enough compare themſelves to the Sheep, and the Man to the great Shepherd of our Souls, whoſe we are, and from whoſe Ways we all have, indeed, like Sheep, gone aſtray; but they do not conſider it is not neceſſary a Parable ſhould in every Circumſtance minutely correſpond to Truth; it is ſufficient if it holds generally, though not particularly exact. To carry on the Parable, our Saviour tells us the Man did go after it until he found it, in order to introduce the Satisfaction that did enſue; but we muſt not conclude from thence, that the further we wander from the Paths of Virtue, and the longer we ramble in the Bye-roads of Sin, that God will, in like Manner, finally extricate us out of thoſe Labyrinths we unneceſſarily and obſtinately perſiſted to loſe ourſelves in. If

we

SERM. IX. we would carry on the Metaphor as we ought, we rather ſhould conſider the Dangers we expoſe ourſelves to, the many Hazards we run, and the Difficulties we entangle ourſelves in, when we forſake the plain and even Walks of Peace, to ſtroll in the Deſerts of Confuſion; that every Step we take, will ſtill render it more doubtful, which Way to ſtrike into the right Road, and every Moment we continue our Route, make our Recovery more precarious, if not impracticable. The loſt Sheep could not be in more Danger of the ravenous Wolf, or of becoming a helpleſs, defenceleſs Prey to the Tooth of every greedy Devourer, than Man, ſtraggling he knows not where, is of being ſnared and trapped in the Toils of Perdition: And the Innocence and Inoffenſiveneſs of the one, would prove no better a Security for the Protection of its Life, than the Care and Circumſpection of the other, for the Preſervation of his Steps. Our Saviour might probably allude to this helpleſs Animal, to ſhew us more conſpicuouſly, that though there was a Poſſibility of being recovered when loſt, yet the Chances that

that made against it, were too many for one not altogether desperate, causelesly to risque.

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We shall not find much to our Purpose in the Parable of the Piece of Money, and therefore let us pass on to that of the Prodigal Son. We find him taking Leave of a tender, indulgent Parent, ready to gratify him in any Request, launching into the World, with a Substance fatally proportionable to satisfy for a while the unrestrained Passions of thoughtless Youth. When Want, the common Merchandize of Obstinacy and Extravagance, and Experience, the dear-bought Attendant of it, opened his Eyes, or as the Scripture says, when he came to himself, he resolves to return to, and throw himself upon the Mercy of his Father; and we find he had Compassion on him; for when he saw him at a Distance, he ran, and fell on his Neck, and kissed him. If we consider the Circumstances of this short Narrative with a little Attention, we shall see no great Encouragement for Sinners to persist in the Perverseness of their Ways, through a Presumption of a Pardon at last. We may, indeed, see Cause to adore the Mercy of God, and to be amazed

SERM. IX. amazed and astonished at the Folly and Incogitancy of rational Man.

It matters not what Substance he received, or what Time he took to consume it in; however, consume it he did; and what was the first Consequence? When he had spent all, there arose a mighty Famine in the Land. Into what a Dilemma is he immediately brought? from the Freedom and Liberty of Excess, to the Necessity of Hunger and Thirst; from rioting like a Fool, to feed like a Beast.

Thus do Men foolishly involve themselves in Troubles, and plunge themselves into Torrents of Affliction. The Famine would not have been any particular Hardship upon him, had he not made it so to himself: It was his own Indiscretion, his own Wickedness, that had perverted the Blessings of God into the Bane of Life; and what would have afforded him Superfluities with Care in ordinary Seasons, is now, by Extravagance, made insufficient for Necessaries in the most pressing. It is common for Men, but very unreasonable, to say no worse of it, to charge Heaven as the Author of their Afflictions, whereas, did they but rightly consider, they

they might discern in all other Instances, as well as this, their own indirect Proceedings, their criminal Practices, and manifold Offences, are the natural Causes of them; for as we sow, we must expect to reap. Providence, indeed, is frequently and surprizingly instrumental in extricating us out of our own far-fetched Calamities, often, upon a constrained Repentance, screening us from those Tempests our Sins have stirred up round about us; but never active in sending ought to perplex us, further than, upon a just Provocation, leaving us to ourselves.

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But to proceed——How long he continued in that despicable Condition, and what Efforts he tried to excite Charity, we only are to guess; however, we may venture to say, it must be some Time before he could be reduced to submit to that servile Office of feeding Swine, that Reputation and Substance deserted him together, since that was the only Place of Trust he could procure, and that he must severely have suffered the Pinchings of Hunger e'er he could stoop to that miserable Shift of appeasing the Cravings of an empty Stomach with Draff and

SERM. IX. Husks. He would undoubtedly solicit hard for other Relief, and study to move Compassion: This, I say, we may guess; but let him act as he pleased, we are assured that it was now fruitless to petition; for we read——*No Man gave unto him.* To what a Degree of Wretchedness was he reduced? Well might he reflect, even with Envy, upon the preferable Condition of his Father's hired Servants.

Now what I would propose to your Consideration is, not only to think upon the Miseries the Prodigal Son foolishly brought upon himself, but likewise to remember how long it was, and what Hardships he underwent before, as the Scripture terms it, he came to himself. What Insults and Affronts, Ingratitude and Contempt, for all these he must have met with, could not effect, fatal Necessity only could bring about. For, what mean Things can we not suppose he would do, or what Employment would he have refused, before he would have undertook to feed Swine: What Offals would he not have been thankful for, before he would endeavour to fill his Belly with the very Husks they did eat: And yet all this,

this, as disagreeable as we may think it, he submitted to, before ever he thought of returning to his Father. SERM. IX.

I dare say you are beforehand with me in the Application I am going to make.

To make a proper Use of this Lesson, should teach us to be abundantly cautious not to transgress the Laws of Virtue, for we cannot violate them without subjecting ourselves to the Penalty; the Consequence of which is, a Mutiny of our Passions, and Discontent within ourselves, our Grand Adversary always assiduous to foment the Quarrel, well knowing that a House divided against itself cannot stand. Every false Step will be succeeded by another, the further we proceed, the further from Grace, and, like the Prodigal, exposed to all those Calamities in a far Country, our Virtue will be exhausted, ourselves unable, and we at too great a Distance from God to renew it. Every Passion will conspire to make a Havock within us; and what will be as gauling, they will all afterwards unite in upbraiding us. No doubt but either the Harlots on whom the Prodigal wasted his Substance, or the Persons

SERM. XI. with whom, ought in Gratitude to have relieved him out of that Excess of Necessity; but no Compassion amongst them: And should not this remind us, when we have gratified every Desire, indulged every Thought, and fooled away our Innocence, those Passions that betrayed it, and hurried us on to our Ruin, will finally yield us like Comfort and Consolation with the Prodigal's Company.

Another Thing I would observe to you is, after People have brought themselves into this melancholy and deplorable Condition, they are generally busied, even to sin in low Life, still resembling the Prodigal: If they cannot indulge in more expensive Follies, they, for the most Part, will rather endeavour to satisfy themselves with the very Dregs of Pollution, than think of returning to the Father of Mercies. Now what is there of Pleasure in the whole Progress of the Prodigal, that a thinking Man would envy him for? Who is there that would desire such a Journey, with all the Accidents and Misfortunes annexed to it? Begun in Vanity, and ended in Vexation of Spirit.

Let

Let not any one flatter himself with the vain Hopes of returning at last, 'tis at best but very precarious and uncertain: A Man may, it is true, escape Shipwreck upon a Plank, and his unexpected Safety may occasion the like Transport and Extacy of Joy with the Woman's over her Money that she found; but sure no one would run that Hazard that could reach the Shore without venturing his Life upon such a Contingency. Besides, there is another Thing which these Advocates for dying the Death, without leading the Life of the Righteous, take for granted, which really they have the least Reason of all Men to do; that their Return, whenever it happens, a Thing so uncertain, but we will suppose it, that their Return, I say, shall be attended with this Sincerity, and a hearty Repentance for all past Miscarriages; and without this, all their Pleading will be in vain. They may, indeed, and often do act the Prodigal's first and foolish Part, but seldom have the Wisdom or Grace to see and confess their Folly. Do not think I am here offering any Thing to deter the most wicked from Repentance, but rather

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SERM. IX. let him set about it as fast as he can. And let us, in order to a comfortable and well-grounded Assurance, that we shall be found true and sincere Servants of God at the Hour of Death, make it our Business to serve him in Righteousness and true Holiness, all the Days of our Lives. *Amen.*

St. MARY'S,
Oxon.

SERMON

SERMON X.

The Devout Centurion's Petition granted.

MATTHEW VIII. 8, 9.

The Centurion answered, and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shou'dest come under my Roof: But speak the Word only, and my Servant shall be healed.

For I am a Man under Authority, having Soldiers under me: And I say to this Man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my Servant, Do this, and he doeth it.

IT would be no easy Matter to determine, whether is most conspicuous and commendable, the Centurion's Faith, or his Modesty; his Affection to his afflicted Servant, or his generous and open

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SERM. X. Confession of his own Unworthiness. The first, was so great, that we find our Saviour himself acknowledging, *that he had not met with such, no, not in* Israel: His Modesty was such, as even the very Affection he had for his Servant, could not prevail so far, as to induce him to make a personal Application; and yet his Affection too strong to permit him to let Slip an Opportunity of making Interest for his Assistance, by the Mediation of others; and his Acknowledgment of his own Unworthiness was so evident and honest, as even to declare, he thought our Saviour would debase himself only by coming under his Roof.

If you compare this with the Account in St. *Luke*'s Gospel, you will there understand more clearly, that the *Centurion* first engaged the Elders of the *Jews* to solicit in the Behalf of him, for the Recovery of his Servant; for sometimes you may find one and the same Story more circumstantially told and related by one Evangelist than another; but never so as to be contradictory to each other, wherefore these Illustrations are so far from Contradiction, that they are rather to be look'd

upon

upon as Confirmations. There, I ſay, you may perceive he firſt engaged the Elders of the *Jews* to entreat our Saviour, and that not without reaſonable Grounds of Aſſurance of their uſing their utmoſt Endeavours; for though he was no *Jew* himſelf, yet he was a devout Perſon, a Favourer of the Nation, and a Friend to their Religion, and not unlikely a Worſhipper of the true God; for, they, when pleading in his Favour, alledge in his Behalf, that he had built them at his own Charge, a Synagogue.

In both Goſpels, there is the ſame Teſtimony of his lively Faith, and the ſame Approbation of our Saviour's of it, namely, that it was ſuch as he had not found, no not in *Iſrael:* As alſo the ſame Expreſſion of his no leſs ſingular Modeſty, and generous Acknowledgment of his own Unworthineſs. His Faith is manifeſted in this ſhort Sentence; *Speak the Word only, and my Servant ſhall be healed*; and the Reaſonableneſs of it is beautifully ſhewn in the following Verſe: *For, I am a Man under Authority, having Soldiers under me; and I ſay to this Man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh*;

SERM. X. *cometh; and to my Servant, Do this, and he doeth it.*

Here is a plain, and undeniable Evidence of his Belief of our Saviour's Omnipotency, and consequently of his Divinity; for though strictly speaking, the Allusion does not altogether hold up, because we may say, that God has a more absolute Controul and Dominion over the Diseases of his Creatures, than any Commander can have over the Wills of his Soldiers, yet it was a glorious Declaration in a *Centurion*. But, perhaps, it would be no false Conjecture to say, the *Centurion* might mean otherwise; and when he sent this Message, give them to understand, that he really believed, though his Authority over his Soldiers was great, and theirs over him, which he means, by being one himself under Authority, was likewise so, yet that neither of them were so absolute as that of our Saviour's over the Diseases and Infirmities of Men, which he here declares, should depart at his Pleasure, whether he came to remove them or not. I say, this Conclusion is by no Means foreign to the Text, and as such, we must acknowledge

ledge it to be ſo extraordinary an Inſtance of Faith, as merited that ſingular Diſtinction of it, given by our Saviour; and if any Degree could deſerve ſuch a Reply, we muſt confeſs this did——*Go thy Way, and as thou haſt believed, ſo be it done unto thee.*

There are a great many Circumſtances in the Behaviour of this *Centurion*, not unworthy the Notice and Imitation too, of a Chriſtian, and which, therefore, deſerve our more particular Conſideration. I ſhall take the Liberty of running them over, and at the ſame Time endeavour to ſhew you how you ought to regulate your Conduct by them.

And *firſt*; His Modeſty is very conſpicuous, in rather chooſing firſt to engage the Elders of the *Jews* to ſollicit for him, than to make Application himſelf; or at leaſt to join with, and ſtrengthen his Intereſt; he looked upon himſelf as unworthy of ſuch a Favour, and though he could not but be conſcious of his own Virtue, yet he would not allow it to be a Ballance to his Imperfections. Though he had the Character of being worthy, for whom our Saviour ſhould do this,

given

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given him by others, yet he would not presume to address upon that Account himself. This should be a Lesson to teach all Christians to be modest and humble in their Addresses to God; for though they are expressly enjoined to appeal immediately to the Throne of Grace, without the Intervention of any Intercessor, but *God the Son*, yet it would be well to have their Prayers backed with a becoming Humility, and an influencing Modesty.

Without these, our Petitions would have too much the Resemblance of Demands; and alas! our Merits, even those of the best of us, will not so much as entitle us to a Pardon. We should do well always to remember, that we are as unworthy to enter under the Roof of God's House, as the *Centurion* thought himself unworthy to receive Christ under his: But as we have all a free and general Invitation to come and offer up our Petitions there, we should be especially careful not to render ourselves the most unworthy, and that is by absenting ourselves, and rejecting such an Invitation. Infinite as the Distance is, between God and us, yet as he has so far indulged us,

as

as to admit us into his more immediate Presence, let not this Privilege on the one Hand, beget in us a presumptive Assurance, nor a Sense or Dread of his Majesty on the other, a desponding Diffidence. Our Hearts and Affections should then aspire up towards Heaven, but it should be in Resemblance to the Fire upon the Altar, not without Trembling. As nothing is so likely to recommend our Petitions to the Divine Disposer of all Goodness, as an engaging Modesty, so likewise nothing more conducive to make a Petitioner reasonable in his Requests, and upon that Account almost sure to succeed.

If this Disposition does not always meet with Rewards here answerable to its Merit, yet it seldom fails of Applause; and God, who is more equal in the Distribution of his Favours, will not forget finally to recompence it. It is generally attended with other good Qualities also; for as it will never magnify, or multiply, over-value or boast of its own Virtue, so neither will it lessen, or depreciate, diminish or detract, that of others; much less impute to them, Errors or Mistakes they

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they were innocent of. It will look upon all the Neceſſaries and Conveniencies of this Life, as Bleſſings indeed, and a Senſe of its own Unworthineſs of them, will only render it more grateful for them. This muſt undoubtedly be allowed, that it is not only the moſt likely to have a Continuance, but an Addition of theſe Bleſſings; for what more prevalent to obtain future Favours, than to be thankful for thoſe already received.

Only conſider, with what an Eye Heaven is likely to behold an Object addreſſing it with all Deference and Submiſſion, as the only Source and Fountain from whence all its Happineſs muſt flow, and acknowledging all that it enjoys, to be a free and generous, bountiful and unmerited Donation, and all that it ever expects, here or hereafter, to be the Benevolence of the ſame Place, and who can ſuſpect but that ſuch Obedience and Interceſſion, ſhall meet with Succeſs, and ſuch Gratitude for preſent Enjoyments, ſhall finally be rewarded with future and endleſs Felicity. Such a Votary as diſclaims all Merit in himſelf, and puts all Confidence in God, through the Merits

of

of Chriſt, aſks with Submiſſion, and receives with Thankfulneſs, is ever the moſt likely to have returned him the *Centurion*'s Anſwer, *Go, and as thou haſt prayed, ſo be it done unto thee.*

The next Thing worthy of your Obſervation, and Imitation alſo, is the *Centurion*'s lively Faith. No Doubt but he had heard much of our Saviour's Doctrine, if not immediately from himſelf, yet from the Relation of others; and the Confirmation of it, by his many extraordinary Miracles; and he not only heard, but believed. To what then muſt we impute his eaſy Faith, for many others at that Time remained obſtinately incredulous, in Oppoſition to the Teſtimony of their own Senſes. The *Centurion* had no particular, or ſingular Proof given him of our Saviour's Divinity, to excite his Faith, but what was publick and common to all: Nay, he believed, upon Report, whilſt others would not believe their own Eyes. If you but conſider the ſhort Character we have of him in the Goſpel, the Reaſon will manifeſtly appear, of his ready Belief, *viz. He was a devout Man*; it is, indeed, but a ſhort Character, but

it

SERM. X. it is in Scripture, a compleat one: We have little more of another Centurion, *Cornelius*, than that he *was a devout Man, and one that feared God, with all his House*; and yet, an eminent Writer has declared, that he admires that short Sketch more, than if he had been represented as the most victorious General, that had enlarged the Bounds of the *Roman* Empire: For we learn from it, says he, this useful Lesson, that the Influence of a pious Example, like the precious Ointment from *Aaron*'s Head, descends downwards from the Head of the Family, diffuses itself over the main Body, until it reaches the very Skirts, the lowest Members of it. But to return.

He was then a devout Person; that is, according to the Scripture Phrase, One that is upright and sincere, one that fears God; and at such embracing the Faith, there is little Reason to wonder. An honest, uncorrupted, unpolluted Heart, is easily susceptible of Faith; but when that is tainted by Sin, or made callous by Iniquity, no Reason can then preserve it, or Demonstration mollify it. This was the Case of all the unbelieving *Jews*; it was their

their Hypocrisy that occasioned the Hardness of their Hearts, and their extraordinary Blindness was the Effect of their unparalelled Wickedness.

The *Centurion*'s Virtue had manifested itself by many outward and undeniable Signs; some of which we have related, as his Fear and Veneration of God, his favouring the Religion of the *Jews*, and his building them a Synagogue; and here he no less evidently demonstrates a lively Faith, the genuine Effect of it. His Heart was properly disposed to admit and embrace Divine Truth, and being thus convinced within himself, of the Sufficiency of Christ's Almighty Power to grant him his Petitions, he was qualified to put them up, and to receive the Gratification of them.

This should beget in all Christians the like lively Faith, and learn them that the surest Way to believe as he did, is to fear and reverence in like Manner. There is no Reason to doubt or suspect the Faith of a really devout Person; for he, of all Men, would be the most inconsistent, who could pray to, and address a Being, which he only questioned unable or un-

SERM. X. willing to grant him his Petitions; but they who ſhew a Neglect of Devotion by an open Contempt of Religion, muſt either be confeſſed to be faithleſs, or elſe, if that can be, ſomething worſe. Let not then your Neglect of Religion bring your Faith into Suſpicion; be no leſs conſtant in your Addreſſes, publick as well as private, to Heaven, than firm and ſteady in your Belief; let your Faith be made evident by your Devotion and good Works, and your good Works and Devotion will animate and invigorate your Faith.

Another Thing obſervable in the *Centurion*, is his humane, tender, and compaſſionate Diſpoſition, demonſtrated here in his Affection to his Servant. This amiable Diſpoſition is by nothing ſo much ſtirred up and cheriſhed, as by Devotion; the ſame Inclination that directs it to apply to Heaven for Relief and Redreſs, will ſtrongly influence it to intercede and implore for more than Self. A Fellow-feeling of, and Concern for other Perſon's Sufferings or Misfortunes, is in none ſo conſpicuous as in the Religions. Religion naturally excites Pity, and removes all De

gree-

grees of Diſtinction; the Royal Pſalmiſt makes it the Characteriſtick of the Righteous to be ever merciful, and here the *Devout Centurion* has exemplified it. It is true, indeed, we do not read in the Goſpels, that our Saviour recommended his compaſſionate Temper, but his Faith only; they are too ſhort and conciſe to be ſuppoſed to mention every Particular, otherwiſe we might reaſonably conclude, that he who made it his ſole Buſineſs, and went about teaching and preaching the Goſpel of the Kingdom, and healing all Manner of Sickneſs, and all Manner of Diſeaſes among the People, would alſo be well pleaſed with, and applaud that Tenderneſs in others, thus remarkable in himſelf.

Hence, then, we ſhould all do well to learn, that our Love and Affection is not to center in ourſelves; for though it may begin, it ſhould not end there, neither is it to be confined to our Superiors or Equals, but to extend itſelf to the moſt Inferiors. We ſhould put up our conſtant Prayers to Heaven, in the Behalf of all Mankind; for I do not doubt, but many here have ſome to whom they ſtand in a

SERM. X. near Relation as Christians, lying at home, like the *Centurion*'s Servant, if not sick of the Palsy, yet grievously tormented. If we prayed for them as we ought, we should pity them, and if we pitied them, according to our Abilities, we could not desist relieving them.

To conclude: Let a Remembrance of the *Centurion*'s Devotion be a Means to stir up your's, and after a little Continuance, there will be no Reason to doubt your Faith; for, I have read of a Deist, who said, he wished he could believe; to whom it was replied, Do but live one half year as if there were Religion, and by that Time I will undertake you come to believe it. Let his Humility always put you in Mind, when you enter into the House of the Lord, how unworthy you are to come under his Roof, and you will be in no Danger of praying with Presumption. And finally, Let a Sense of the Wants and Necessities of others be mingled with the Intercessions you make for the Relief of your own, accompanied with such a lively Faith as can cry, *Speak the Word only,*

and

and thy Servant shall be healed, as the only sure Method to return home with the *Centurion*'s Answer——*Go thy Way, and as thou hast prayed, so be it done unto Thee.*

SERM. X.

Amen.

St. MARY'S,

Oxon.

SERMON XI.

The Love of God and our Neighbour, inseparable.

MATTHEW XXII. 37, 38, 39.

Jesus *said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy Heart, and with all thy Soul, and with all thy Mind.*

This is the first and great Commandment..

And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thyself.

BEFORE we enter upon a Discussion of these Words, it may not be altogether amiss, to enquire into the Reason of our Saviour's Reply, which was this: The *Sadducees* had just been put to Silence

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in a Point wherein they thought they ſhould have triumphed over our Saviour, and proved the Impoſſibility of a Reſurrection beyond all Diſpute; but how far they themſelves were confuted by their own Arguments, and how plainly contradictory to their own Tenets he ſhewed them to be, Scripture ſufficiently tells you, and at this Time it would be foreign to my Purpoſe to enlarge upon, or repeat it. The *Phariſees* were not a little pleaſed with this; their Antipathy to them was no leſs real and unfeigned, than their Piety and Sanctity was ſuperficial and deluſive, and the Doctrine of the Reſurrection was what they were as ſtrenuous in maintaining, as the others backwards in believing: But then *they* alſo were equally deſirous of trapping our Saviour.

When they, therefore, beheld the *Sadduces* put to Silence, and their Knowledge of the Scriptures, which they mightily boaſted themſelves upon, manifeſted deficient and erroneous, they ſolicit a Lawyer to attack him with this momentous and extraordinary Queſtion, concluding from his Anſwer, either to expoſe his

Ignorance

Ignorance, or to diſplay their Doctor's Underſtanding. *Maſter*, ſays he, *Which is the firſt and great Commandment?* Had he not anſwered him immediately, I need not tell you the Conſequence; but then I muſt tell you wherein his Anſwer proved more than that Sect deſired ſhould be true. Our Saviour, willing as he was to comply with the Requeſt, at the ſame Time ſhews the *Phariſees*, ſo remarkable for the Profeſſion of the Law, that they, and all ſuch as were ſo fraught with Envy and Hatred, Malice and Contempt, were mightily defective in the principal Obſervation of the firſt and great Commandment; that Diſaffection and Ill-will to our Neighbour, and many other Crimes diſſonant to ſincere Charity, were incompatible with the Love of God. *Thou ſhalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy Heart, and with all thy Soul, and with all thy Mind:* Which no one can obſerve, unleſs he alſo obſerves the ſecond, which is like unto it, *viz. Thou ſhalt love thy Neighbour as thyſelf.* For he, indeed, that loves God with all his Heart, will in all Things obey him; and he that loves his Neighbour as himſelf, cannot

be

SERM. XI. be presumed to live in Enmity or Hatred, in Adultery or Fornication, to bear false Witness, to steal or purloin, or to covet; in short, he will be observant of that Golden Rule, of doing to others as he would they should do unto him.

Our Saviour here, then, I would observe to you, at the same Time that he satisfies their Curiosity, takes an Opportunity to correct their erroneous Doctrines; shewing them how impracticable it was, to pretend to be devoted to the Service of God, and to love him with all your Heart, Soul and Mind, and to be at Variance, or in Enmity with Mankind, *i. e.* in the Scripture Phrase with our Neighbour, as they actually were without common Charity for any but their own Sect. Had he stopt short, they would only have commended his Answer, as a Pattern of their Traditions, and had he been silent, they would have accused him of Ignorance of the Law; but he at once manifests his superior Knowledge, and displays their no less Want of Comprehension than of Charity.

The *Pharisees* Misinterpretation of the Law, a Study in which they laboured to be

be thought profound, if not infallible, was hereby proved no leſs notorious, than the falſe Notion of a future State, or rather of Annihilation the *Sadducees* had drawn from the *Pentateuch*, in which they were ſo remarkably converſant. The *Phariſee*, it ſeems, from an *Inſidiator*, was almoſt become a *Convert*; and we might ſay of him, as *Agrippa* ſaid of himſelf, when he had heard of St. *Paul*'s Defence, *Almoſt thou perſuadeſt me to be a Chriſtian*; for we find even Chriſt confeſſing, *He was not far from the Kingdom of God.*

Another Reaſon may alſo be given for this Reply: The *Phariſees* had not only often endeavoured to entangle him in his Diſcourſe with their premeditated and perplexed Queſtions, but even, as we read, upon ſome of theſe Parabolical Cenſures and Reproofs juſtly paſt upon, and which they as evidently perceived levelled at them, entered into a Conſpiracy againſt his Life. This might prompt him to ſhew them how contrary to the Love of God, the great Commandment, ſuch wicked Deſigns were, how oppoſite to all thoſe Laws they would be thought

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ſo clearly to underſtand, and ſo exactly to conform to, ſuch groundleſs Perſecution was, and how repugnant to all the Precepts and Declarations of the Prophets ſuch a revengeful Diſpoſition did render them.

This, likewiſe, will clear our Saviour from that falſe Aſperſion, caſt upon him by modern and impious Unbelievers, who accuſe him of a Falſhood, in calling his great Precept of loving one another, a new Commandment, ſince, ſay they, it is manifeſtly as old as *Moſes*, in whoſe Laws it is expreſly required, *Thou ſhalt love thy Neighbour as thyſelf.* But then our Saviour had ſo much enlarged it, by extending it to all Mankind, and heightened the Degree of it: So effectually taught, ſo mightily encouraged, and ſo wonderfully exemplified it, that though it was a Precept delivered by *Moſes*, yet conſidering in what Manner the *Scribes* and *Phariſees* had perverted the Senſe, and confined the Practice, and limited the Bounds of it, there is no room to aſperſe our Saviour for calling, as he taught it, a new Commandment.

Having

Having given you ſome probable Reaſons for the Reply of our Saviour in the Words of my Text, my Buſineſs now ſhall be to ſhew you the inſeparable Connexion there is between the Love of God, and the Love of our Neighbour.

I need only to mention to you this, by Way of Explanation, that to love God with all our Hearts, is to pay an entire Obedience, and a ſincere and affectionate Homage to his Will; to love him with all our Souls, to ſerve him without any Reſerve; and to love him with all our Minds, to put all into a conſtant Execution. That to love our Neighbour as we love ourſelves, is, to do unto all Men as we would they ſhould do unto us.

Now this Love of God is not to be out-rivalled by any other Affection; but then it does not exclude all others; nay, it rather ſuppoſes them. For what other End can that Exhortation of our Saviour's tend, *Seek ye firſt the Kingdom of God*, unleſs he likewiſe knew, and allowed other Things were to be ſought after, and had, in a due Subordination a proper Degree of Eſteem and Reſpect allotted

them

SERM. XI. them in our Minds. He ſays, indeed, *He that loveth Father or Mother more than me, is not worthy of me*; but he juſtly condemns thoſe who want a due Regard for either.

It is only the Strain of wild Enthuſiaſm, and thoſe who unreaſonably reject the Bleſſings of bountiful Heaven, and look upon a State of Bankruptcy, as it were, in the Pleaſures of this Life, the State to be wiſhed for, which dictates and proclaims ſuch romantic Doctrine, that all our Love is to center in God alone, *i. e.* Nothing elſe is to be the Object of it. For, really it is an unnatural Divorce of our Affections, and a Kind of putting aſunder, thoſe whom God hath joined together. By this we may underſtand, that ſome Men do themſelves as much Injury by thinking too cloſely, or too refinedly, as others by taking no Thought at all; and that Error is as frequently the Reſult of an Imagination aſpiring to, but loſt in, the Clouds, as of that groveling on the Ground.

He that pretends he can ſee all Things in God, as ſome fooliſhly aſſume, and yet can ſee God in nothing elſe, looks with

with a pharisaical Eye, that could discern Sanctity in the Gold, but none in the Altar which sanctified it.

As to the Deity himself, we can have no direct and immediate View of him; but we may behold him in the Works of the Creation, and love and reverence them, which will demonstrate our Love for the Creator. Love so abstracted and refined from every other Object, would be destitute of that Charity and Affection we owe to our Brother, if not productive of Pride and Contempt, which blast and contaminate all human Virtues: And, indeed, St. *John* seems to think it implies a Kind of Impossibility to be rich either in Goodwill towards God or Man, without abounding in both. *If any Man love not his Brother*, saith the Apostle, *whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?*

A Man enjoying the Blessings of Heaven in a becoming Manner, is the most likely to return agreeable Thanks, and shewing Marks of Esteem and Respect to his Fellow Creatures, to pay the most lively Homage and submissive Resignation to the Universal Creator. Every Instance

of

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of Mercy and Kindness towards either himself or his Brother, will administer fresh Supplies of Matter for his Wisdom to contemplate, and his Gratitude to adore. Every Object of Want or Distress, afford him an Opportunity of exemplifying unwearied Liberality, and the more generous and tender, affectionate and compassionate a Sense of his Duty to God renders him, the more constant and earnest will his Addresses be, and the more importunate and urgent his Supplications. In short, the more sincere his Love to God, and the more real his Respect for Man. But then, whosoever entertains any Ill-will or Hatred to Mankind, the Master-piece of the visible Creation; in the Works of which 'tis only possible for him to discern any thing of God, for that Reason cannot be supposed to be well affected to the Creator. Argue whilst you please, this we may affirm, that no Man can love God in himself, without, at the same time, loving him in and for his Works.

Perhaps it may be ask'd; Is our Love and Affection to be equally extended to all? Are we to make no Distinction between Friend and Foe, Relation and Stran-

ger,

ger, the Virtuous and the Wicked? The very Terms ſuppoſe it, and it would be unreaſonable, a Thing the Scriptures never enjoin, to conclude otherwiſe. But let me obſerve to you, there are two Kinds of Love, *viz.* firſt, a Love which carries along with it Approbation or Eſteem; and ſecondly, that which is attended only with Benevolence or Good-will. The former is only the Product of an Intimacy perſonally contracted, or the Tribute due to exemplary Merit and Virtue: The latter common to all Men. A Perſon may many Ways forfeit, or perhaps no Way deſerve our Approbation and Eſteem, though he cannot our Benevolence or Good-will, and many muſt neceſſarily have little of the one, by Reaſon of the Narrowneſs of our Sphere of Acquaintance, though the other may be univerſal. You may, indeed, wiſh well to all; but you can approve and eſteem *them only*, whom you know; and know to be worthy of Eſteem.

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But will not Vice and Immorality loſe a Perſon a Part of our Love? Yes, that conſiſting of Approbation, but not our Compaſſion. Our Bleſſed Saviour has left

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us a lively Pattern for our Imitation: He had great Provocation to ſhew his Reſentment to the Unbelieving *Jews*, and their Sins were extraordinary, and their Incredulity not to be accounted for, and yet we find him pitying them, and even praying for their Forgiveneſs, inaſmuch as they did what they did in Ignorance: *Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.* Reſentment then you ſee is not to extend to the Perſon, though our Diſapprobation of a Crime may declare an Averſion to the Commiſſion of it. Nay, ſometimes the very Reaſon why we are angry for a Perſon committing a Fault, is, becauſe we love him.

The Scripture leaves us to our own Reaſon, as to the Extent of this Duty, nor does it enjoin an indiſcriminate Beneficence to Men, whether Friends or Foes; it only enjoins us to injure none, and as far as we can, to do Good to all. Nor does it require us to perform any Acts of Kindneſs to our Enemy, that might prove more prejudicial to ourſelves, and that upon this Account, becauſe we are not to love our Neighbour *better* than ourſelves.

Where

Where do all the good Qualities of a Friend, the tender and healing Offices of a Benefactor, the kind and timely Aſſiſtance of a Protector, and the generous and diſintereſted Councils of an Advocate, more viſibly diſcover themſelves, than in their Breaſts who are heartily devoted to the Service of Heaven? On the other Hand, who are for the moſt Part ſo ſtrict in every Branch of their Duty to God, as thoſe who are obſervant of it to Man? Unfeigned Religion is ever accompanied with Charity, and Charity is never at Enmity with God. In ſhort, there is ſuch Harmony between the Love of God and our Neighbour, that he who will pretend to either ſingly, upon every little Provocation or Diſappointment, manifeſtly ſhews ſuch Diſcord in his Behaviour, as proves he is void of both.

Will any Perſon pretend to Sincerity and Affection to his Brother, without the Love of God; let me aſk him why he ſhould think to gain Credit? His very Creation is a Bleſſing he cannot be too thankful for, and it is generally attended with more than I can repeat, to

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increaſe the Obligation; but then his Redemption is ſo extraordinary, that he who can ſeriouſly reflect upon that unmoved, and unaffected, can give no greater a Proof of Ingratitude, and more clearly diſcover, he would ſit down unthankful under a Crown of Glory. Is ſuch a Perſon to be truſted? And muſt we rely upon his Honour?

Honour, ſays an eminent Writer of our Church, is a very good Word, and ſounds well; but what can the Libertine, who makes a Jeſt of moral Virtue, and of all the Motives proper to render Men virtuous, mean by it? Nothing, certainly, but Humour, or, at moſt, a decent Compliance with what is generally eſteemed by Mankind, commendable and Praiſe-worthy. But then this Reaſon can oblige the Libertine to a Conduct that is reputed honourable, no longer than he can upon ſome private Views engage in the moſt diſhonourable Deſigns, without being found out.

If the Notion of Honour conſiſts only in an external Regard to the common Sentiments of Mankind, the Libertine, I grant, is obliged, in Point of Honour, to

to keep the Secret of his Friend, where the Diſcovery of it would turn to his Diſgrace; but where he can betray his Friend, without betraying his own Baſeneſs and Infidelity to the World, there the Laws of Honour, according to his Notion of it, can lay no further Reſtraints upon him.

The ſame may be ſaid of our pretended Zeal for the Service of God, when barren of that neceſſary Love which is like unto it. Our Addreſſes may be frequent, but our Actions will render them abortive; our Petitions may be fervent, but our Practice will impede their Succeſs; and the Number of our Prayers will not expiate the Number of our Oppreſſions or Omiſſions.

Let then our Love and Affection to our Neighbour, witneſs the Sincerity of our Zeal to God, and our Zeal approve itſelf in good Works to Mankind, being well aſſured, that on theſe two Commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets. *Amen.*

St. MARY'S,
Oxon.

SERMON XII.

Upon the Resurrection.

ROMANS VI. Part of Verse 9.

Death hath no more Dominion over him.

THERE is no one scarce yet, who heartily and sincerely embraced Christianity, that ever disputed, or suspected the Truth and Certainty of Christ's Resurrection. It would be a strange, unreasonable, and unaccountable Way of Proceeding, to profess a Belief of his Divinity, and to expect Salvation by Faith, through his Merits, whom we could imagine detained by Death from vindicating his own Omnipotency, or pleading and maintaining our Justification.

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Well might the great Apostle, in another Epistle of his, wherein he is

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making the most glorious and sublime Defence of this Doctrine, put those strong Interrogatories to the faithless *Corinthians*. *What shall they do which are baptized for the Dead, if the Dead rise not at all? Why are they then baptized for the Dead?* And a few Verses before those already cited, make Christ's Resurrection in particular, the only Proof and undeniable Argument of Mankind's in general: For though the Words, literally taken, seem to infer, that if the Dead rise not, then is not Christ raised; thereby making Christ's Resurrection depend, as it were, upon ours; yet it may, without any torturing or wresting of the Text, and no less agreeable to the Sense of the Apostle, as well be expressed thus: If Christ is not risen, neither will you be raised, in Consequence of which it follows, then is your Faith vain: Your Belief in him is fruitless, ye are yet in your Sins, and all that are fallen asleep in Christ, are perished.

Our Contest then, in this Dispute, is not to be carried on with Christians; for whatever Professions they may, in other Points make, yet to dispute it in this,

this, I think, we may fairly pronounce, is denying the Faith; and of such I shall not be remiss or afraid to join with the Apostle, in declaring, they are worse than Infidels.

To believe in the Name of Christ, and deny his Merits, is no more than *Mahometan* Christianity; and to pretend to trust in, or rely upon his Merits, and doubt his Resurrection, is such a Contradiction, as Scepticism itself must stand ashamed of: In short, to assert the Impossibility of it, is to espouse *Atheism*; to urge the Absurdity, or Unreasonableness of it, is to patronize *Deism*, and to deny the Necessity, or any Ways contend for the Inexpediency of it, the most undeniable Argument of the worst and most devilish Degree of *Heresy* and *Infidelity*. All Exceptions that ever were, or can be made against the Sufficiency of Christ's suffering for the Sins of the whole World, and rising again for their Justification, are but various Strains, and frequently little more than Repetitions, without any Variation, of the same unbelieving Spirit; wherefore, as they have been already more than sufficiently confuted in their own Way, I shall have Recourse to

another

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another Method, and endeavour to disprove all that has been advanced, by giving unanswerable Proofs of his Divinity from the Cradle to the Cross, without concerning myself, or troubling my Audience, with a Recital of Prophecies long foretelling his miraculous Birth, and all of them fulfilled in his most exemplary Life, carried on and continued by his Death and Passion, and compleated and ended by his glorious Resurrection and Ascension: For if the Deity can be proved manifest in these, it will be no more to their Advantage, or any longer answer their Purpose, to talk of and insist upon Impossibilities, Absurdities, Contradictions, or Inexpediencies, and such like; because, God cannot be charged with any such.

And first, As to the Manner of his Birth, the Scripture is full and particular concerning it; and in the Relation we have of it, nothing more intelligibly described than the Deity. In any Thing but Essentials, the Holy Penmen for the most Part, are short and concise, but in this, a most material one, they are particularly careful to demonstrate the close

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and wonderful Connection between the Divine and Human Natures. The Place in which he was born, may, indeed, be looked upon as mean, and his Parents, however honourable by Descent, reduced to the Necessity of taking up with that, merely for Want of wherewith to defray the Expence of a better: But then, tho' an Inn, and the most unsuitable, uncomfortable, and disagreeable Part of it, was allotted for his Appearance into the World; yet, had he Angels, and the Host of Heaven, as Heralds to proclaim his Nativity. His Humility herein was undoubtedly inexpressible; but then, in other Circumstances, it was more than parallelled by an unspeakable Degree of Majesty.

All Human Pomp and Pageantry would have been infinitely beneath the Dignity of Heaven, and all Human Elogiums have been mean and poor; wherefore it was much more agreeable to exalt and elevate the low and mean Estate, to which the Virgin was providentially reduced, than to degrade Omnipotence, by appearing in the Grandeur of the most potent or powerful upon Earth; and all

Human

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Human Composition was mightily surpassed, by that short, but comprehensive, Doxology of the heavenly Multitude. *Glory to God in the Highest, and on Earth Peace, Good-will towards Men.* The Birth of any mere Man could not be supposed to give any additional Glory to God; to be so peculiarly instrumental in procuring that Peace upon Earth, or so efficacious in producing that Good-will towards Men.

Nothing less than the Birth of God the Son, could be Matter of such Glory to God the Father; and the God of Peace (a Title to which he could lay so indisputable a Claim) was the only proper Person to introduce that Peace upon Earth, which alone could further and propagate that Good-will towards or amongst Men. What though he wanted any, or all the external Signs of Royalty, yet the Magi, or wise Men, from the East, wonderfully conducted by the Direction of an additional Star, proclaiming his Birth to Regions far more distant than the Extent of the largest, and most unbounded Kingdoms in the World, immediately on their Arrival where the young

young Child was, made their Obeysance, and paid him Homage, offering him Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh; the proper and peculiar Donations to him, as King, Priest, and Prophet. Here then we find no less inferior a Messenger than an Angel to proclaim his Birth; and the espoused Virgin's Husband to witness and confirm it; nor are we to forget that *Elizabeth*, in her old Age, and after she had long been counted barren, wonderfully brought forth his Forerunner; and that his Father *Zacharias*, for a Time, lost the very Faculty of Speech, to which, in order to name the Prophet, he was no less astonishingly restored; and as miraculously filled with the Holy Ghost, to declare the Dignity and high Importance of his Son's Office, and the Divinity of him whose Forerunner he was ordained, concluding his prophetick Speech with these Words: *And thou, Child, shalt be called the Prophet of the Highest: For thou shalt go before the Face of the Lord, to prepare his Ways; to give Knowledge of Salvation unto his People by the Remission of their Sins, through the tender Mercy of our God, whereby the Day-Spring from on High hath*

SERM. XII. *hath visited us, to give Light to them that sit in Darkness, and in the Shadow of Death, to guide our Feet into the Way of Peace.* These, together with the Wise Men from the East, wonderfully conducted to adore, and worship him; and the Shepherd's extraordinary and unparallelled Visitation, and Declaration thereof, are all of them Arguments so strong, and Testimonies so manifest of his Divinity, without taking Notice of his miraculous Conception, that he who remains unsatisfied and unconvinced, after a serious and impartial Examination, may fairly be pronounced Proof against Reason, and deaf to common Sense. But that a Testimony should not be wanting, according to *Erasmus*'s Observation in his Paraphrase, either from Heaven or Earth, from Man or Woman, old or young, the devout old *Simeon* is remarkably described, when the Parents of *Jesus* brought him into the Temple to do for him after the Custom of the Law, in a most emphatical Manner, through the Influence of the Holy Ghost, declaring and discovering the Lord's Christ. For at that Time, we are told, he came into the Temple by

by the immediate Direction of the Spirit, and no sooner took him up in his Arms, but blessed God, and said——*Lord, now lettest thou thy Servant depart in Peace, according to thy Word; for, mine Eyes have seen thy Salvation; which thou hast prepared before the Face of all People: A Light to lighten the* Gentiles, *and the Glory of thy People* Israel.

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Thus, continues *Erasmus*, did *Jesus* receive Testimony from Angels, the Blessed Virgin, her chaste Husband; from the Priest *Zacharias*, and even from *John* in his Mother's Womb, from *Elizabeth* herself, from the Shepherds, and the Magi, from the Scribe's declaring from the Prophecy where Christ should be born; from *Herod*'s Trouble and Concern at the Wise Men's Report; and from *Simeon*, who was neither Priest or a Levite, but only a just or devout Man; and last of all, a Widow joins in Confirmation, being divinely inspired to speak of him to all them that looked for Redemption in *Jerusalem*.

These, doubtless, must be acknowledged plain and undeniable Indications of Christ's Divinity, before he was of

Years

SERM. XII. Years himself, to establish and confirm them: Though it is to be remembered, he gave Proofs of a more than ordinary Capacity, and far more than common Judgment and Understanding before he was arrived to an Age, in a general Way, capable of discovering or displaying either to Advantage. As he increased in Stature, the Deity gradually unfolded itself; and, we may safely assert, demonstrated him perfect God, sooner than he could well be pronounced perfect Man! 'Tis true, indeed, we find little or no Account of our Saviour in the Writings of the Evangelists, from the Time of his discoursing and disputing with the Doctors in the Temple, until he entered upon his Ministry, which it is generally allowed must be about his thirtieth Year; so that for the Space of eighteen, we have nothing remarkable concerning him; however, we have no Occasion to be at a Loss for an Answer why there should be such an extraordinary Silence. The Evangelists, as I before observed, are very short and concise in the Manuals they have left us, and thereby discover to us, they wrote not so much for our Amusement or Entertainment,

tertainment, as for our Profit and Interest. Had they studied, or endeavoured after Prolixity, they might, indeed, have swelled up their Narratives into a voluminous History; but then they would only have been of Service, if really so then, to those who had both a great Part of their Time to spare, and an Inclination as well as Capacity, to consult and digest them. Brief as they now are, they have afforded Matter more than sufficient for the Captious and Unbelievers, to dispute and contest; and had they been more full and particular, there is little Reason to conclude, they would thereby more effectually have tended to convince the Ignorant and Unlearned; and very much to affirm, that in Proportion to the Augmentation of their Size, the Number of Cavils and Objections would likewise have been multiplied and increased. They now contain all the Transactions of our Saviour's Life, which it any Way concerns us to be acquainted with; or would be profitable for us here, or hereafter, more particularly to have related: As they are now published, little Time will serve to read them over, neither does it require

SERM. XII. any great Strength of Memory to retain, or any large Share of Parts to understand them: [I mean those only necessary to be understood, in Order to Salvation] We are briefly and plainly instructed in all Things that bear any Relation to his Mediatorial Office; how he came into the World, not only to teach us, but to die and rise again for us: As our Prophet, to instruct us by his Heavenly Doctrine; as our Priest, to offer himself a Sacrifice upon the Cross; and finally, to loose the Bands of Death, and ascend triumphant into Heaven, as our King.

But to return from this short Digression; the next Account we have of our Saviour's Appearance in publick, was a little before he entered upon his Ministry, *viz.* When he thought proper to remove from his private Retirement at *Nazareth*, and leave his Mother, and his Trade, as some apprehend, to pass into *Judæa*, to *Bethabara*, on the Banks of *Jordan*, where *John* was baptizing. At this Time, it must be confessed, there was exhibited the strongest and most undeniable Manifestation of the Trinity since the Days of the Creation, when God said, Let

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us make Man in *our* Image, after *our* Likeness. SERM. XII.

God the Son presents himself here to the Baptist, to whom it was revealed, that on whom he should see the Holy Ghost descend in a bodily Shape, remaining on him, that same was he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost: God the Holy Ghost did visibly descend in the Manner of a Dove, in Attestation of his Divinity; and God the Father, in Confirmation of what both had so intelligibly discovered, by an audible Voice from Heaven, declares him his beloved Son, in whom he was well pleased.

What a glorious and an amazing Act of God's Omnipotence was herein displayed on the one Hand; and of our Saviour's inexpressible Humility and Affection, towards Mankind, on the other? He, in the first Place, so far to condescend to conceal, or divest himself of, his Divinity, as to stand in Need of any Witness to attest it; and the Father to cause that ineffable Discovery of his Glory, in the Break or Unfolding of the Heavens, with the visible Descent of the Holy Ghost, together with that Voice

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that then accompanied it! That ever Persons could see, and hear this, and live, is wonderful; but, that any could see, and hear, and disbelieve, is as much surpassing our Credit, as the other our Comprehension.

Such an Intercourse upon Earth was never before seen or heard of: The Glory of the Lord appeared, and his Voice was heard, but not as it was in the Days of *Moses*, when there were Thunderings and Lightnings, and a thick Cloud upon the Mount, so that all the People that were in the Camp trembled; but here Majesty and Complacency wonderfully united, no previous Care to forbid the People to gaze, lest the Lord brake forth upon them, but only an Assurance how well he was pleased with his beloved Son, and an Injunction to hear him. To the Multitude who beheld these Things, and heard this Voice, might justly be applied that private Address of our Saviour to his Disciples on another Occasion: *Blessed are the Eyes which see the Things that ye see. For I tell you, that many Prophets and Kings have desired to see those Things which ye see, and have*

not

not seen them; and to hear those Things which ye hear, and have not heard them. SERM. XII.

With what other Views, or for what other Reasons, besides those alledged by our Saviour himself, he came to *John*'s Baptism, it would be foreign to the Design I now have in View, here to consider; I, at this Time, having no more to prove, than that we have both from himself and the Testimony of Heaven, sufficient Demonstration of his Equality and Coessentiality with the Father and Holy Ghost, touching his Godhead, as being the most undeniable Answer to all the Objections that can be raised either in Respect to the Impossibility, Absurdity, Necessity, or Inexpediency of his Resurrection.

After these Attestations of his Divinity from Heaven, before he entered upon his Ministry, let us proceed to consider how in the Execution of his Office, he distinguished himself in every Respect, agreeable to his Character.

Time will not permit me to descend to Particulars, and Necessity does not require it; wherefore I shall content myself with instancing this in general.

SERM. XII. And first, As a Law-giver, Preacher, or Instructor. The Perfection of his Laws is only to be parallelled by the Purity of his Precepts, and the Purity of his Precepts, by the Soundness of his Doctrine; of which it may be alone truly affirm'd, Obedience to these, and Conformity to those, with a constant and exact Observation of the latter, will prove the only sure Method of rendering Men easy and good here, as well as happy and blessed hereafter. The Laws of old, or *Mosaical*, are hereby in no Parts, but the Ceremonial or Ritual, abridged; in all others perfected and fulfilled. The Precepts only more full and express where their Traditions, and Human Injunctions, had defaced, or made of none Effect the Divine; and his Doctrine such only as could proceed from one, no less divinely inspired to teach and instruct, than commissioned to oblige and enjoin. His Authority was no less manifest from the Sanction he was able to give his Laws, than the Stability of that Foundation he built his Precepts upon; and his Doctrine no less clearly approved him, a Teacher come from God, than the Manner in which he

he delivered it, by astonishing the People, manifested his Superiority, to them, over the Scribes. In short, as in all Cases, and on every Occasion he spake (which they themselves could not but sometimes confess) as never Man spake; so may we say, he confirmed the Truth of all, by working such Miracles as never Man wrought.

The Deity was as conspicuous in these, as discernable in the other, and if those did not always carry along with them sufficient Demonstrations of the Dictates of the Holy Spirit; these seldom wanted undeniable Proofs of Divine Power, to ratify and confirm them. His Miracles were all wrought in Attestation of his Divine Commission, to which he frequently appeals; and that Commission, thus indisputably proved, was sufficient to authorize him to give the like Sanction to his Laws and Doctrine. To all this, let us add, the Example he has left us, every Way conformable to his Doctrine, agreeable to his Precepts, and altogether corresponding to his Laws; and that not according to Human Frailty, by Fits and Intervals, or in some Particulars more

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agreeable to Temper, Disposition, or Constitution; but in a constant, uniform, continued, and uninterrupted Series, from the Cradle to the Cross.

Now, if none, or any, of all this can be denied; and, I think, he has small Claim to the Title of Christian, who will deny any of it; then, doubtless, all Disputes must cease, concerning the Reality of Christ's Resurrection. The Necessity of the Union of the two Natures at the mysterious Incarnation, Nativity, Baptism, Cross, and Passion, since revealed, has been received, and held absolute; and though at his precious Death and Burial, a Separation of them so far may be supposed, whereby to found that Article of our Creed upon, his Descent into Hell; yet, by the same Authority, and Parity of Reason, must we conclude, they did again unite at his glorious Resurrection and Ascension.

All Mysteries, it is true, may, and, indeed, ought to be looked into; but, then, as an eminent Writer justly observes, it should also be remembered, they should be looked into, or examined with Reverence, because Mysteries: However, in this

this before us, there is enough discovered; that he who is equal with God, in every Respect, except his Manhood, *God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, and of one Substance with the Father*, is the Person who himself assured us, after three Days, he would rise again; and, as he, by all those various Kinds of Evidence, I have cursorily run over, proved himself to be that Person; to talk of Impossibilities, Absurdities, or Inconsistencies, in this Case, is, therefore, to charge God with such; than which, I think, to say no worse of it, there can be no greater Absurdity.

Can it with any Reason be supposed, that that Mystical Union between the two Natures, (to go no further back) begun in the Cradle, continued from it to Maturity, and even unseparated until expiring on the Cross, should finally be dissolved in the Grave? Would not this Dissolution thereby render the Union much more liable to Absurdities, Contradictions, or Inexpediencies, than even the Resurrection itself? If we were to grant there was a Possibility of the Manhood's longer Continuance in the Confines

of

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of the Earth, yet, as there was no Necessity for it, had Scripture been silent, we might have ventured to assert, there was no Probability; but as it had suffer'd, as soon as convenient, it should also be glorified: But if any, notwithstanding what is thus clearly and plainly revealed to us, will stand out in Opposition to it, then may they as well deny the whole Scripture Account, from the Creation to the Crucifixion.

One Thing, before I draw to a Conclusion, I will just beg Leave to observe; that there was little Reason for Heaven, or Christ himself, to give any such evident and undeniable Proofs of his Resurrection, as they have vouchsafed; considering the various, numerous, and equally astonishing as convincing ones afforded us, at his Birth, and through the whole Course of his Life, of his Coexistence, Coessence, and Consubstantiality with God the Father: All that could be presumed to be wanting, must be some Reason to conclude, the Manhood should again be re-assumed, and that is over and over assured us; but had there been no other than our Saviour's single Declaration,

tion, that had been sufficient, because he who promised, was no more capable of imposing a Falshood, than he can be presumed unable to make Good, what he had unalterably determined to perform. All Cavil must vanish, and all Sophistry give Way, when they are told it is God that said it. And they must stand asham'd of their Contradictions, and such like Objections, when they hear that the Lord hath declared it.

Let us, then, remain satisfied with the Scripture, assuring ourselves we thereby cannot be deceived: We may read. and rejoice to read, all Human Confirmation of this Doctrine, but our greatest Comfort and Consolation should be to read it attested and confirmed in those lively Oracles, to the Truth of which God himself hath fixed his Seal: There we are not only ascertained that Death hath no Dominion over him, but that we also, if we are planted together in the Likeness of his Death, shall be also in the Likeness of his Resurrection. *Amen.*

St. MARY's,
Oxon.

SERMON

SERMON

SERMON XIII.

The good *Samaritane*'s Example Recommended.

St. LUKE X. Part of Verse 37.

Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.

IT is very remarkable, in all our Blessed Saviour's Conferences with the inquisitive *Jews*, how kindly and affectionately he leads them into the Truth, how gently and tenderly he discovers to them their Errors, and generally so familiarly and plainly sets before them the Reasonableness of his Doctrine, as at once to make them perceive and confess it themselves. He never, like the Pharisees, sought how he might entangle them in

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their

SERM. XIII. their Talk; but always took ſuch Methods as were ſure to confute, if they did not convince them.

Whether the Queſtions they put to him were deſignedly or deliberately intended, either to confound or perplex him, to trap or expoſe him, he ever returned them ſuch Anſwers, as, though they thereby might underſtand he was not altogether ignorant of their ſecret Antipathy againſt him, yet ſuch as demonſtrated a real and unfeigned Regard for them, always diſcovering a greater Concern to convince them of the Truth, than any Deſign to diſtinguiſh himſelf. Thoſe who read with any Attention the ſhort and plain Accounts contained in the Goſpels, cannot but be ſenſible of this; and muſt often be at a Loſs, which moſt to condemn or admire, the Capricioufneſs, Ill-nature, Obſtinacy, and Perverſeneſs of the *Jews*; or the Mildneſs, Affability, Condeſcenſion, and Meekneſs of our Saviour. When their Enquiries were made viſibly with a Deſign only to poſe or perplex him, he manifeſted his ſuperior Knowledge without expoſing their Ignorance: When their Intent was principally to trap and intangle him,

him, as this was frequently the Case, tho' he made them sensible he was not a Stranger to their Designs, yet he ever avoided Reflections in his irrefragable Replies. When they had only a Desire to have better Information, and discovered that Instruction was the Motive of their Interrogation, then he enlarged upon their Question, and gave them more comprehensive and extensive Solutions, than the Manner in which they had stated or understood it required, imparting to them a clear and perfect Knowledge of the Extent and Nature of those Duties, they had imperfectly ask'd after. In short, if he perceived them in any tolerable Disposition to receive Instruction, let them be ever so ignorant or defective in stating their Question, he was sure to be full and satisfactory, clear and conclusive, in the Answer that he made them. Instances of this Truth are so frequent and remarkable in the New Testament, that I may as well conclude you are altogether unacquainted with it, as imagine you are Strangers to them.

I shall therefore, at this Time, confine myself to the Conversation between our

Saviour

SERM. XIII. Saviour and the Lawyer, which, after he had shewn him the Extensiveness of Charity in a familiar, but expressive Allusion of a Man falling among Thieves, and the Manner of his being relieved by the *Samaritane*, ended in the Words and Advice of my Text, *And Jesus said unto him, Go, and do thou likewise*, and from thence endeavour to shew you more at large the Universality of it; and, secondly, make some useful Observations which naturally may be inferred from this Conference.

And, first, from the Account we have of this Discourse, between our Saviour and the Lawyer, we have no Reason to conclude, that a Desire of better Information was the chief Motive of his asking that Question, *What shall I do to inherit eternal Life?* For we read the Lawyer stood up tempting him: But from what our Saviour said to him we shall soon find he discovered to him, if not an unknown, an unwelcome Truth. You may observe our Saviour declined giving him a direct Answer, but referred him to the Law of *Moses* to determine the Case, the Knowledge of which his very Profession supposed him to be Master of. The Scribe immé-

immediately answered then, the Law requires, that *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy Heart, and with all thy Soul, with all thy Strength, and with all thy Mind; and thy Neighbour as thyself.* *Jesus* was not displeased with this Reply, but approved it, and bid him perform these Conditions, assuring him, that the only Way to express his Love to God, was by an affectionate, sincere, constant, and universal Obedience to his Commands, acquainting him, that it was not the Knowledge, but the Observance of the Law, that would entitle him to eternal Life. From the Silence of the Lawyer in Respect to the first Commandment, and from the general Character we have handed down to us of the *Pharisees*, of which Sect this Lawyer was, there is Reason to conclude, he had no Suspicion of his being any Way faulty or defective in his Observance of that, but rather that he prided himself, as the rest of them did, upon that Account, but of all Pride, Spiritual Pride is the worst, and that, for this short Reason, it is apt to be such, whenever we pride ourselves upon it. However, we

Serm. do not find that he made any Doubt of XIII. the Sincerity of his Love towards God, nor yet of that towards his Neighbour, only he wanted to know who was his Neighbour. The *Jews*, always looking upon themselves as the chosen and peculiar People of God, had conceived an Opinion, that their Want of Respect or Charity to the *Gentiles*, as all out of the Pale of their Church were called, was so far from being a Breach of this Commandment, that they were not in any wise bound to shew or extend either to them by it: And having been formerly commanded to rout, and drive out the Idolatrous Nations from before them, they still imagined it consistent with Charity to live in Enmity, and at Variance with them. Wherefore, upon the *Scribe*'s asking our Saviour that Question, *And who is my Neighbour?* He, very well knowing to what narrow Limits they had confined their Love or Charity, without immediately answering it, chooses rather to shew him the Universality of Charity by a Similitude that could not fail of affecting him, and finally obliges him to convict himself. There was a certain Man, says he, travel-

travelling from *Jerusalem* to *Jericho*, and he in the Way met with Thieves, who, not content with robbing and stripping him, wounded him sorely, and left him upon the Road half dead. Now it happened that a certain Priest passed by that Way, who one would have thought by his very Place and Office, professing great Holiness and Charity, should have assisted the poor wounded Traveller: But when he saw him stripped, wounded, nay, half dead, he passed by at a Distance on the other Side, unaffected, unmoved, and went on his Way. A little while after, a *Levite* came likewise to the same Place, in his Passage upon the Road; of whom, if not for the Sake of his Religion, yet, at least, upon the Account of his Tribe, it might have been expected, that he should have had Compassion on his Brother, and have relieved him in his extreme Distress; but this Man also, only looked on him, and passed by without doing any Thing for him. At last, a certain *Samaritane*, passing by that Way, saw him, and took Pity on him; and, though a Stranger to the Nation, and an Enemy to the Religion of the *Jews*, yet, in

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SERM. XIII. in great Charity, he stopped, and went to him, and washed and dressed his Wounds, pouring in Oyl and Wine, and set him upon his own Beast, and carried him to an Inn, and saw all necessary Care taken of him. And the next Day, being obliged to continue his Journey, he called the Master of the House, and paid him for the wounded Man's Lodging, and other Expences, and gave him strict Charge to take further particular Care of him until he should recover; and promised, at his Return, to pay all the Charges.

Now, said *Jesus* to the *Scribe*, which of these three Men do you think was properly the poor Traveller's Neighbour, and did the Office of a Neighbour to him? The Priest and *Levite*, that passed by and neglected him? or the *Samaritane*, who, though a Stranger both by Birth and Religion, yet, with great Charity, assisted and relieved him? What an effectual Method was this, to bring the *Scribe* to an Acknowledgment of his Duty! and without any further Examination into his Knowledge and Understanding of the Law, whereby he might, perhaps, in a more particular Dispute, have been under

a Necessity of either discovering his Weakness, or raising his Resentment, to make it no Disgrace, by this plain and beautiful Allusion, to own his Conviction, and answer his Question himself? The *Scribe* could not but confess, that he that charitably assisted him, was, no Doubt, his best Neighbour; which was the shortest, and most unexceptionable Way to make him see, and all that read it, understand, that they are not to look upon those only to be their Neighbours, who dwell near them, or are of the same Nation, Religion, or Sect; but every one, who stands in any Need of their Relief or Assistance, however otherwise he may be a Stranger to them, and so to extend their Charity to all Mankind.

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As this was the Method our Blessed Saviour took, to convince the tempting Man, do not by your Practice or Behaviour contradict the Confession then made, or, whatever you refuse or neglect to go, will do likewise, it necessarily must. There was no Sophistry, no more undeniable, whereby our Saviour could prove to all the World, the Reasonableness and Ne-

Serm. XIII. ceſſity of Univerſal Charity, than by ſhewing the Agreeableneſs of it, even between *Samaritane* and *Jew*; for, if either Difference in Religion, or oppoſite Intereſt of Nations, or, in ſhort, any ſecular Pretence whatever, would excuſe the Neglect of it, then might the *Samaritane* have charitably paſſed by: But by this we are plainly taught, that any of theſe Objections, or all of them together, are not ſufficient to cancel the Obligation we are under, to the Performance of this Duty.

Having thus briefly run over the Diſcourſe of our Saviour with the *Scribe*, and at the ſame Time demonſtrated to you, the Extent of this Duty from it, I ſhall now, as I propoſed, endeavour to make ſome ſuch uſeful Obſervations as naturally may be inferred from this ſhort, but inſtructive Conference.

And firſt; from hence we may eaſily obſerve, that it is our Duty, whenever we meet with an Object in Diſtreſs, to exert our utmoſt to aſſiſt and relieve him. Buſineſs itſelf, and much leſs any other common Pretence, will not excuſe this charitable Act; the Neceſſity of our

Brother

Brother demands our Aid, and this plain Similitude of our Saviour's tells us, we are upon no Account to withhold it: For, consider this Allusion but a little, and you will find the *Samaritane* was upon a Journey, and we may reasonably suppose upon Business too; yet, no sooner does he meet with a Person in Want of Assistance, but that is deferred 'till what was more needful, was performed. SERM. XIII.

We may also hence furthermore understand, that our Charity is not to be scantily or niggardly practised and performed, and that if we will act the Part, we must perform the Duty of a Neighbour. We must not content ourselves with Wishes or Good-will, but add what will render them more sanative, though it cost us more. For we find by the Example before us, which I shall all along have in my Eye, and to which also I shall confine myself, the poor Traveller was not only taken Care of, his Wounds dressed, and his Beast restored him, and then left to himself; though many, I am afraid, would have stopped here, and few have done so much.

SERM. This, in Case the *Samaritane* had not had wherewithal to have relieved him, would have been an Act of Charity; but as he had, it would not have merited that Title. Where little is, little is required; but where much abounds, and Wishes only are the Fruits, it is a direct Self-Contradiction; for, there is no Man ever wished that to another, which he could afford him himself; but the same avaricious Disposition that withheld him from granting, would likewise incline him to endeavour, or at least desire to intercept it himself.

The *Samaritane*, I say, after he had dressed his Wounds, and set him upon his Beast, did not leave, or turn away from him, but charitably accompanies him to an Inn, interrupts his own Journey, and affectionately takes Care of him himself, for that Night not willing, whilst he was in Danger, to leave him to that of any other.

This should be a Lesson to all, to teach them how, not only to commiserate, but to relieve any under Misfortunes or Afflictions; not only to condole with, and

recommend

recommend them to the Benevolence of others, but, when it is in their Power, to assist them themselves, and as far as in them lies, to contribute to reinstate them into their former Condition. For, you are to observe, this properly stiled Neighbour, whose Business, we may presume, would admit of no longer Delay, orders the Master of the House to take all further necessary Care, and not to suffer his Guest to depart, 'till his Recovery was compleat, and he would be answerable for all additional Expences.

In such a precarious, uncertain, deluded, and deluding World as this, we can travel no Way, but we may meet with Objects, if not stripped and wounded, yet equally deserving, and demanding our charitable Assistance. Not that I am for encouraging or promoting an indiscriminate Charity; for thereby Indolence and Vice in Disguise, might often be encouraged and indulged, when only Necessity and Industry were meant to be relieved and supported.

Unsettled, and wavering as the World is, God knows we have more Impostors than

than real Sufferers, and sometimes it happens, that the Deceit of the former, carries away the Prize and Reward of the latter: Therefore, Caution is requisite, not that I imagine, whatever is done with a charitable Design, though it should happen to be to a Person who has artfully imposed upon you, will therefore lose its Reward; but I would rather these Things should so be done, as the Reliever and the Relieved, might equally be happy for the Gratuity.

However, this Caution ought not to tye up your Hands too fast, and, under a Pretence of being sometimes deceived, prevent you shewing Compassion to any; Nay! you should rather run that Risque, than be thus insensibly deaf to the Cries of all; as any rational Creature would rather that many guilty should be acquitted, than one innocent Person should suffer.

To conclude then: The World is wide enough, and I have shewn you who is your Neighbour; whilst you are in it, Opportunities will never be wanting;

ing; and may the All-bountiful God to whom he has given Abilities, grant Hearts also, that they may, with the compassionate *Samaritane* in the Gospel, *Go, and do likewise.* *Amen.*

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St. DUNSTAN, *Stepney.*

ing, and may the Almighty God, to whom he has given Abilities, grant them who, that they may, with the compassionate Samaritans in the Gospel,

SERMON XIV.

The Privacy of Christ's Resurrection, considered in Argument against the Truth of it.

Acts X. 40, 41.

Him God raised up the third Day, and shewed him openly,

Not to all the People, but unto Witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the Dead.

THERE is no Article of the Christian Faith more necessary to be asserted, and consequently more clearly and undeniably to be proved and defended, than that of Christ's Resurrection; for, if Christ be risen, then is our Preaching vain, and your Faith

SERMON XIV.

The Privacy of Christ's Resurrection, no Argument against the Truth of it.

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THERE is no Article of the Christian Faith more necessary to be embraced, and consequently more clearly and undeniably to be proved and defended, than that of Christ's Resurrection; for, if Christ be not risen, then is our Preaching vain, and your

SERM. XIV.

Faith

SERM. XIV. Faith also is vain: But if all such Evidence can be brought, and all the Proof that the Nature of such a Fact will admit, can be produced, then, I would presume, such a Foundation may be found to erect Christianity upon, as neither the Wickedness of Man, or the Malice of his grand Enemy in every Thing, but this, and herein only his grand Deceiver, will ever be able to overthrow. As upon the Truth of this depends the Truth of our Religion, we need not so much to be surprized to hear it denied by the obdurate and obstinate *Jew*; and ridiculed and objected against, by the no less prejudiced and sinful *Infidel*.

In some Cases, I think it would be as excusable for a Person to persist in the Wrong, merely through Obstinacy, without any Defence, as it is in others, to stand up in Opposition to Truth, with such weak Arguments to confront it. And in these before us, it is not easy to determine, whether are the more inexcusable, the obstinate *Jews* of old, for denying the very Fact of Christ's Resurrection, and, therefore, only continuing

in

in Unbelief; or the modern Enemies of revealed Religion, objecting against the Truth of it with Arguments so very inconclusive, and yet persisting in Infidelity. SERM. XIV.

There is no History that I ever yet read, wherein it is denied, there ever was such a Person as *Jesus Christ*; neither did I ever read any other Objection against our Saviour's Resurrection, but that handed down to us by the Evangelists; and, therefore, I call the *Jews* Denial of it, and, I think, not without Reason, Nothing but a downright defenceless Self-determined Resolution, to continue in Unbelief: And I am verily persuaded, they might have proceeded as successfully, and I am certain, as prudently, in endeavouring to impose upon the World, as they did upon themselves, that he likewise rose from the Dead, as well as wrought his other stupendous Miracles, through the Aid and Assistance of *Belzebub*.

The Devil, indeed, is called the Prince of this World, and, we may say, if he had any Hand in the Miracles of those Times, that he never before, or since, so far

SERM. XIV. far exerted his Prerogative and Authority over the Bodies of Men; but admitting that true, which never can be proved, I am afraid he has since demonstrated, and even then shewed a more absolute, irresistible Controul, over their Wills and Affections.

That ever Men of Sense and Reason should have Recourse to such senseless, unreasonable Evasions, is strange and unaccountable! When he had wrought amongst them any extraordinary Work, which the Eyes of the Multitude only prevented them directly denying, to impute it to the Co-operation and Assistance of the Prince of Darkness! And when he finally raised himself from that Grave to which their Sins had brought him, and out of which he rose for theirs, as well as our Salvation, to cry his Disciples came by Night and stole him away: Alas! what can be more weak? Better, or, however, more plausible had it been for them, to have stuck to their former Evasion, and never have suffered his old Assistant to have left him to the Care and Conduct of his poor, defenceless, and dispersed Disciples, but rather still

still confidently affirmed, that he rose at the Command, or by the Aid, of his Fellow-Miracle-Monger *Belzebub*.

The Circumstances at his Death were very strange; the Darkness such as could not be in any wise paralelled, unless by the Darkness of their Understandings: The Vail of the Temple was rent in Twain from the Top to the Bottom, not only signifying the Dissolution of the *Jewish* OEconomy or Dispensation, and the opening to all Believers an Entrance into the Holiest, *i. e.* into Heaven by the Blood of *Jesus*; but remaining also as a perpetual undeniable Testimony to the other Truths in that Relation. They were confirmed by the terrible Shock of an Earthquake, and by the cleaving of the Rocks, that some great Alterations were working by the mighty and immediate Power of God.

These were generally and universally felt and known, and, therefore, not to be denied; and, if upon the third Day Day at his Resurrection, the Workings of Omnipotence were not so publick to the Senses of every one, yet, from the Relation the *Jews* had of the Descension

SERM. XIV. of the Angel, and his rolling back the Stone from the Door of the Sepulchre, whose Countenance was like Lightning, and whose Raiment was white as Snow; I say, from this Relation given them by the Soldiers, no Men could have been so weak as to have bribed them to make such a barefaced, idle Report, but such as were also so wicked, as to back and attest it. In short, there was nothing left undone for the Conviction of the *Jews*, but what would have rendered Conviction fruitless; nor do I, indeed, know that they had any other Reason for their Disbelief, or really ever pretended to give any, but such only as People have when they are driven to Contradiction, *viz.* They will not be convinced.

But our modern Unbelievers, if not more wisely, yet no less wickedly, have been at the woeful Pains to furnish the World with Arguments, against this fundamental Article of the Christian Faith, the overturning of which they too well know would be no less than the entire Extirpation of all Religion.

Were

Were we to form a Judgment of the Validity of their Arguments, from the Number of their Proſelytes, I am afraid this too degenerate Age would incline one to give it in their Favour: But then when we come to conſider, and examine who, and what theſe numerous Proſelytes are, we ſhall fatally find them to be ſuch as would not only be glad to diſprove the Being of God the Son, but ſuch likewiſe as would be as glad to dethrone that of God the Father. However, let us hear what theſe Advocates for Infidelity have to ſay in Vindication of themſelves, allowing them all the fair Play any reaſonable Diſputants can deſire; for believe me, if we cannot anſwer whatſoever they object againſt Chriſt's Reſurrection, we may, ourſelves, as well renounce Chriſtianity: I ſhall, therefore, be more particularly deſirous of your Attention, as to this Part, becauſe, as I before hinted, what the *Jews* alledged againſt it, I really think may be concluded to amount to no more than an obſtinate, poſitive, and defenceleſs Denial of it.

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And now for our modern Unbelievers. Happy had it been, say they, for the Christian Cause in general, if the Proof of Christ's Resurrection had been made a little more publick and convincing: For whatever may be said in Apology for St. *Thomas*'s Incredulity, (which if it was causeless, was certainly very culpable) it cannot be doubted, but that, had our Lord appeared personally to the High Priests and Rulers after he was risen; made an open and triumphant Entry into *Jerusalem*; and frequented the Temple, and other Places of publick Concourse, that every Eye might see him, and receive full Conviction, for the Time that he abode upon Earth; it cannot be doubted, say they, but that in this Method, he would have given the World fuller Satisfaction, than in remitting us to the Testimony of his Apostles, who were all his own Creatures, and, consequently, Evidences, against whom we may make a just Exception.

If thus to dictate to the Almighty, and to prescribe Rules and Methods to Omniscience, contrary to those he has condescended to pursue, in Order to convert

vert Mankind, be not Presumption, then may we fairly pronounce, it is not in the Power of this All-sufficient Man to insult, nor in the Nature of Omnipotence to be insulted. It is scarce possible to say, which amazes one, (though not which shocks one most) the Condescension of the Almighty Creator, or the Insolence of the weak and impotent Creature. To hear vain Man lay down Rules for the Conversion of the World, that never yet could prescribe Laws for the Government of himself!

But let us answer this vain Objection a little more closely, and see whether the Privacy and Solemnity of Christ's Resurrection, as recorded in Holy Writ, was not more agreeable to the Majesty of the Almighty, and also no less persuasive and convincing to those who were in any tolerable Disposition to be satisfied and convinced.

And, first; there is no one will deny, but upon the Certainty of Christ's Resurrection, lies all the Stress of the Christian Religion, and likewise, that all necessary Means of convincing the World of the Truth, and confirming them in

SERM. XIV. the Reallity of it, were highly expedient; but then it should be remembered, at the same Time, that Christ now, after his Resurrection, was not to condescend to any Action beneath the Majesty of his Divine Nature, which he had then more fully assumed.

There is none, sure, so positive, so foolish, as to assert, that if he had took this *seemingly desired* Method of publickly conversing with the World again, that he would not again have met with repeated Insults and Affronts, especially considering the late Indignities it had most inhumanly put upon him; and sure none so extravagant as to say, it would have been consistent with his Majesty to have bore them.

And, besides, of all Men living, none ever had, or could render themselves more unworthy of this extraordinary, I had almost said unnecessary Way, of Conviction, than the Unbelieving *Jews*, and Chief Priests.

Another Thing let me observe to you; they had long rejected all the Evidence our Saviour had given them, and when they could not directly deny the Truth of

of any of the Miracles he wrought in Attestation of his Divine Mission, they rather chose to impute them to the Assistance of Darkness, than own them as Signs of Omnipotence; and can it with any Reason, with any Justice, be urged, that such Men as these, who had thus frequently withstood such plain and undeniable Miracles, wrought primarily for their Conviction, should again be favour'd with such a Visitation; especially if you consider, after he had performed that final and most stupendous one; I mean, his summoning *Lazarus* from the unrelenting Grave, after he had lain there four Days, and which was so far from removing their Prejudice, that they after even waxed more inveterate against him, and daily grew more impatient to put him to Death, and that because he had raised one from the Dead? It is really passing a very high Compliment upon these proud People, to pretend, that had they been satisfied, the World would have been convinced; but I verily believe it as foreign from their Thoughts, as their Intention is to establish the Interest of

SERM. XIV. Moral Virtue, at the same Time that they are undermining Revealed Religion.

Again, secondly; Let us suppose, that our Lord had made his personal Appearance before the High Priests and Rulers, after he was risen; yet, if you remember, how little they were moved and affected with the Relation of the *Centurion* at his Death, and with that of the Soldiers at his Resurrection, with the Shock the whole Frame of Nature felt, and when every Thing else was moved, except themselves, can you imagine they would immediately have been convinced, directly have owned his Divinity, and worshipped and adored, what they so lately had scoffed and crucified; or, rather, may it not be more reasonably concluded, they would not only have questioned the Person, and disputed the Appearance, but once more have mocked and denied the God? And what then must have been the Consequence? Either he must resent the Insult, and exert his Power; or else he must once more shew that Compassion, which none but that God could shew, who upon the Cross in the Agonies of Death, cried out, *Father, forgive*

forgive them, for they know not what they do; and withdraw himself from them, thereby leaving them in a full Persuasion, they had only seen a Spectre. SERM. XIV.

This is no more than may reasonably be presumed; and whosoever considers how the God of this World had blinded the Eyes, and hardned the Hearts of the High Priests and Rulers, must acknowledge that they were then in such a State of Insensibility to, or Obstinacy against, all Manner of Conviction, (call it which you please) that they, like *Pharaoh*, would never have owned his Divinity, until he had executed his Vengeance upon them; and Death and Conviction had met them together.

Besides, here is another Reason why our Lord might not think proper to appear before his unjust Accusers, and unmerciful Crucifiers; I do not absolutely say he did, upon this Account, refuse to appear, but only take the Liberty of indulging the Thought.

Suppose, then, for once, he had made this publick Entrance, and they had been convinced of his Divinity, what Kind of Men, what Sort of Creatures, must we conceive

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conceive them to have been, able to sustain themselves under this Shock? Something more inhuman than we can imagine them: Could Flesh and Blood behold the Glorified Son of the Most High, whom just before it had arraigned, condemned, and executed, and live? Had he come into the Judgment Hall with all the undeniable Signs of his Omnipotency, must they not have dropp'd down, expiring under an immediate Expectation of that imprecated Judgment upon themselves, *his Blood be upon us, and upon our Children?* The more of Majesty and Terror he had appeared in, the greater, and more insupportable, must have been their Dread; and the more of Love and Compassion, the greater and more abundant their Confusion. In short, he that can conceive the High Priests to have been such Men, as to have been able to have faced the Son of Righteousness, after the many repeated Indignities they had put upon him, and live, must think them to have been such, as neither Divine Justice could awe, Divine Vengeance affright; neither affected with Divine Mercy, nor melted with

with Divine Love, and but too plainly intimate himself to be one of that Number.

Now the Method which our Saviour took, and the Account the Scriptures give us of it, was neither attended with any of these Inconveniences, which would otherwise have happened, nor any ways defective to procure our Assent. He neither exposed himself to fresh Insults, nor laid the *Jews* under a Necessity on the one Hand, of adding still to their Sin, by contradicting and denying him in his glorified Person, nor endangered their Lives on the other, by exhibiting to their View the Reproach that a late crucified, but then eternally crowned *Jesus*, would have been to them: By this Means giving them an Opportunity to reflect upon their Error, and, by a timely Repentance, to work out their own Salvation.

As to that Expression, used by our modern Unbeliever, wherein he calls the Apostles, Creatures of our Saviour, and, consequently, Evidences against whom Exception might justly be taken; I say, it is unfair, and ungenerous. He has nothing

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thing to lay to their Charge, whereby he can so call their Characters into Question; and though he may say they were illiterate, he cannot say they were dishonest Men.

Their Want of Learning, and their Unacquaintedness with the World, is rather an Argument of their Incapacity to carry on an Imposture, and their Meanness and Poverty a still stronger against their Interest, to propagate and continue it. Every Circumstance proves they actually were, as St. *Peter* in the Words of my Text stiles them, *Witnesses, chosen before of God*; and they not only call'd themselves so, but likewise were enabled to confirm the same by undeniable Demonstrations of such Power, as could only be given them by him, whose Witnesses they were.

The Acts of the Apostles will for ever remain an illustrious and undeniable Catalogue of numberless Miracles wrought by them in Confirmation of the Doctrine of the Resurrection, which they were strictly enjoined to preach, propagate, and defend, and the Manner in which they ever persisted to attest, even when confronted

confronted with Death, that King of Terrors, in his most terrifying Appearances, what they so constantly and convincingly had taught, the best Proof of their own Conviction, and, consequently, ought to be an unanswerable Argument for the World's Conversion.

There are few, if any, of those Miracles of our Blessed Saviour's, an Account of which we have handed down to us by the Evangelists, but what have either been directly exploded, or infamously ridiculed by the Pens of wicked Unbelievers; but those, indeed, of his poor persecuted Apostles have not met with the like ungenerous Treatment, and yet there are none of them, but are such, and so supernaturally wrought, if we may give Credit to the History we have of them, to our unspeakable Satisfaction to this Day unanswered, as plainly bespeak the Workers to have been aided and assisted by a Power no less *mighty* in Operation, than his who first commanded the Heavens, and they were created. But, perhaps, Infidelity concluded, as truly it very well might, if this singular and most important Article could either be disproved

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proved or discredited, whatever was wrought or advanced in Vindication of that Religion, of which it was the only Foundation, would remain of no Importance, or worthy a Confutation. At this, therefore, the Chief of their Artillery was planted; but the Basis on which it was erected, has hitherto been too firm for them to make any Impression, and the Building too closely compact, and fitly framed together, to prevent its Growth into an Holy Temple in the Lord.

I pass over his Sneer upon St. *Thomas's* Incredulity, only telling him, that those Scruples which were in the Apostle Weakness, will be to all that follow him, and know his Story, Wilfulness, it being a Particular worthy of a separate Discourse; and rather strengthening than weakening the Proof of the Resurrection.

At this Time I will detain you no longer, persuading myself I have said enough to make you sensible, whatever is objected to the contrary, that the Privacy and Solemnity of Christ's Resurrection, as recorded in Holy Writ, was not only more agreeable to the Majesty of the Almighty, but also as persuasive, and

and convincing to all who were in any tolerable Disposition to be satisfied and convinced, concluding with the Words of the Author of my Text in another Place: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant Mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively Hope, by the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the Dead. *Amen.*

SERM. XIV.

St. MARY'S,
Oxon.

SERMON

SERMON XV.

The Parable of the Tares.

MATTHEW XIII. 30.

Let both grow together until the Harvest, and in the Time of Harvest I will say to the Reapers, Gather ye together, first the Tares, and bind them in Bundles to burn them: But gather the Wheat into my Barn.

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OUR Blessed Saviour in this Chapter has beautifully set forth, in short Parabolical Discourses, the various Reasons why the Seed, or Word of Truth, is prevented taking Root in the Hearts of some Men; and what Arts and Stratagems the Wicked One hath to impede

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its Growth, when ſown, by ſeizing the Advantage, and watching his Opportunity to ſow Tares, in order to perplex and confound, ſtagger or diſtract the Minds of others. Whether he might chuſe this Parabolical Method of addreſſing himſelf to the inquiſitive Multitude, as moſt conformable to the Cuſtom of the Prophets; or, becauſe he might deem it the beſt accommodated for Inſtruction, and to make the quickeſt and ſtrongeſt Impreſſion upon the Minds of his Audience; as Alluſions and Compariſons taken from the moſt obvious and familiar Things, muſt neceſſarily and immediately affect: Or, whether by ſuch an Attractive, his Doctrine might not find an eaſier and pleaſanter Admiſſion into their Hearts, and there obtain a more ſecure and durable Settlement: Or, finally, becauſe this Way of Admonition was certainly the leaſt liable to give Offence, gently rebuking each Man's Conſcience, without mentioning any one's Perſon; Commentators are of different Opinions: However, upon any one of theſe Accounts, we ought to receive and embrace it with all Thankfulneſs; and, if for no other

other Reason, approve and applaud, because he chose it. SERM. XV.

The great Doctors, *Hammond* and *Clark*, it is true, assign another Reason for our Saviour's making Use of Parables at this Time, and to these particular People; namely, because they were incapable of Comprehension, or unprepared and unworthy to have the whole Truth declared unto them; that the understanding the higher and obscurer Parts of the Gospel, was a Privilege that belonged only to his Disciples, who had already embraced the Truth; and received, and profited by his Doctrine, and undertaken to direct their Lives according to its Rules: But they who had not done so, were fitter to be incited by the Darkness of Parables, to enquire into the Meaning of them; therefore, did our Saviour instill Things into them by Degrees, and teach them by the Way of Comparisons or Similitudes.

However, to return; upon the Multitude's flocking and crowding so earnestly after him, our Saviour naturally and most pertinently begins with a Parable; admirably well adapted to shew

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them, though they outwardly appeared ſo deſirous and attentive to hear him, yet that That was not always a Proof of their being prepared and ready to believe him; from whence we, at this Time, might directly infer, had not Experience from thoſe Days to our own confirmed it, that Perſons manifeſting itching Ears to liſten to the Promulgation of the Goſpel, is not conſtantly a Sign or Indication of the Soundneſs of their Hearts to receive it. An idle Curioſity draws ſome, which is at once both ſatisfied and ſurfeited: They have neither Attention enough to pay a proper Regard to what they hear, or Inclination to reduce it into Practice; the ſame thoughtleſs Indifferency that inclined them to liſten, the ſame will induce them to forget.

Theſe are the firſt Set he characteriſes, by juſtly comparing them to thoſe who received Seed by the Way Side. How many of this Kind the preſent Age produces, the numberleſs Crowd of Atheiſts, Deiſts, or Freethinkers, falſely ſo ſtiled, abundantly witneſſes.

Many, indeed, have not ſo much as Curioſity enough to go to hear what may

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be ſaid in Defence, but more have that *veteran* Hardneſs of Heart, truly culpable in the Unbelieving *Jews*, to hear with a predetermined Intent, not only to ridicule the Defence, but even Chriſtianity, and the Author of it himſelf. SERM. XV.

The next Set he reſembles to thoſe who received the Seed into ſtony Places; of which theſe Days afford us Numbers in Abundance; People, indeed, who ſeem to liſten gladly to the preaching of the Goſpel, and with an apparent Reſolution to obey it; but their Reſolution ſoon diſcovers an Inconſtancy equal to the Shallowneſs of the Soil into which it is fallen; Temptation as eaſily miſleading ſome, and Perſecution warping others, as the Influence of a ſcorching Sun from above, and the Reflexion of a rocky Surface below, burn up the ſpiring Stem, and prevent the Maturity of the otherwiſe moſt prolifick Grain.

A third Company he takes Notice of, aſſuring them, they were not unlike that Seed ſown among Weeds and Thorns; thereby plainly levelling at thoſe, who, after hearing, and likewiſe receiving the Doctrine of Chriſtianity, yet, either

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anxious after Riches or Preferment, or allured with Pleasures and the Amusements of this World, make no Improvement in Religion or Virtue, any further than as they could render them subservient to accomplish their ambitious Designs, or gratify their vicious Inclinations; of which Sort the World in general has ever, and this Place, of late, in particular, afforded various Instances.

Lastly, then, He descends to describe those who hear the Word with Attention, and treasure it up in an honest Heart, by comparing them to the Seed sown in good Ground: The Seed in the good Ground not more certain to produce plentifully, than the Word in an honest Heart to bring forth righteously the one as free from Vice, or any sordid Affection, as the other from Weeds and Thorns; nothing to impede the Growth of this, or any Thing to prevent the Influence of that; and as this has all the favourable Advantages united to hasten, and ascertain its Maturity, so has the other also all the concurring Assistance, both from within and without, to make it productive of good Works.

Instances

Inſtances of Perſons anſwering this Character, are to be found, and though it muſt be confeſſed, the World has not produced ſo many as the Upright could deſire, yet it has not been altogether barren of them: If we cannot now boaſt an equal Number with former Times, yet, without Vanity, may it be affirmed, no one Place ever has afforded more.

Now paſs we on to the next Parable in this Chapter, the Concluſion of which is contained in the Words of my Text; wherein he advances a Step further, and aſſures them, there was yet another Infection to be guarded againſt, if (in Alluſion to his Parabolical Manner of expreſſing himſelf) any of them were determined to lay up pure and unſmutted, ſound and untainted Corn, into his Grainery.

The other Accidents he before had cited, were only ſuch as could affect the Seed juſt when it was ſown, or in taking Root; but this would be detrimental to it, even in Maturity.

This ſeems to be the Devil's Maſter-Piece, to blaſt the Huſbandman's Harveſt,

SERM. XV. *viz.* Whilst his Men slept to sow Tares amongst his good Seed. By which we may understand, that though the Tempter could not obstruct the Growth of the Evangelical Seed in the Minds of some, by suggesting to them wicked loose Thoughts and Imaginations, alluding to that sown in the common Road; or of others, with the Terrors and Apprehension of Persecution and Affliction, and Temptation, meaning that sown in shallow Earth upon a Rock; or by alluring them with Riches, Honours, Profits or Pleasures, or loading with Cares, and frightening them with Poverty and Want, expressed by that which fell amongst Weeds and Thorns; yet, by sowing Tares, he can, tho' grown up, annoy it; which is, in other Words, by raising up false Apostles and false Teachers, Hereticks and Apostates, the Church may be overrun with Heresies, Schisms and Divisions, and he thereby can, and does impose upon weak Men, by specious, false Doctrines, notwithstanding the good Seed once sown in their Hearts.

This Admonition, therefore, will be seasonable at all Times, and in all Places; forasmuch

forasmuch as we are ascertained, and long Experience has convinced us, that whilst we have a Gospel-Revelation, Men will rise up, wresting the Sacred Doctrine to their own and others Destruction, torturing it to countenance their wicked Dispositions and infamous Divisions, calling Evil Good, and Good Evil; putting Darkness for Light, and Light for Darkness; Bitter for Sweet, and Sweet for Bitter.

I do not take upon me to say, the Servants of Christ, the Bishops and Pastors of the Church, are now less watchful than they ought, but rather leave others to judge, from the various, and almost numberless Sects sprung up amongst us, some as ridiculously nominated, as others ridiculously at a Loss what Nomination to be distinguished by, whether the Enemy has not found some Opportunity, and had sufficient Time to sow his Tares in.

Hypocrisy has many Disguises, and the Devil has Habits and Masques for his Actors, suitable to what Character soever they are prepared to perform and personate; though few of them, indeed, make

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make their Exit before their Vizard drops off, or quit the Stage of Mortality, before their Prompter betrays them.

This good Ground, it is true, lies open to all, and if Men will ſleep, the Enemy will ſow his Tares; and as the ſame Soil, animated, as it were, by the ſame prolifick Heat, the ſame enlivening Sun, and refreſhing Moiſture, will neceſſarily give equal Nutrition to the Tare as to the Seed; ſo, in like Manner, muſt we expect, if Connivance or Indifference is continued in the Church, Hereſies of all Denominations will creep up the neglected Walls thereof; permitted, though not cheriſhed, by an All-ruling Providence, finally to diſplay as much Wiſdom in ſeparating and laying up the one, as Juſtice in conſuming and burning the other.

Atheiſm, doubtleſs, has long been exploded and laughed at; but then People of known, profeſſed Atheiſtical Principles, have more frequently met with a courteous Reception, than a merited Reproof, which, undoubtedly, has given no ſmall Encouragement to a more prevailing, though not leſs, dangerous Perſuaſion,

Deiſm.

Deiſm. Deiſm has ſpread in the Ground among the good Seed, in ſo many various Species, Tare-like, that he muſt be no leſs an Herbaliſt to cull out the former, than a Divine to diſtinguiſh the latter, aſſigning to both their proper Appellations.

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The Tenets of the two great Apoſtates, *Arrius* and *Socinus*, are as openly and frequently eſpouſed, as once they were publickly and univerſally condemned; and you may go into many, too many, Aſſemblies, where you ſhall never hear Mention of a crucified *Jeſus*, unleſs it be to crucify him afreſh, by putting him to an open Shame.

I forbear to mention any Thing of the Itinerant Schiſm-Mongers, being verily perſuaded, thoſe Weeds will die of themſelves, little adding Nouriſhment to them but the watery Beams of Ignorance; but theſe undoubtedly deſerve our Animadverſion. If they cannot be all rooted up without damaging the Corn, yet ſurely they may be prevented over-running it. If no human Prevention is ſufficient wholly to ſuppreſs the ſowing theſe Seeds; and if, for Ends and Purpoſes, known only to him who permits it, they

SERM. XV. they must continue till the Harvest; certainly it is the Duty, as well as Interest of every Servant, to concert, as much as in him lies, all Means and Methods, to stop their Increase.

A Church upon Earth without Schism or Division, is no more to be expected, than an Harvest without Cockle or Darnel; but the Sleepiness, Drowsiness, or Carelessness of the Husbandman, may tend to render abortive the Fruits of a promising Crop, as well as the Indolence or Viciousness of the Pastor, suffer Heresy and Apostacy, to gain the Ascendant over Orthodoxy and Truth.

That this is the Case, all Commentators, or, at least, all that I have read, upon the Words of my Text, seem to be agreed; wherefore, a watchful Prevention, we may safely presume, is really expected, though an absolute Disappointment may not strictly be enjoined.

One of the Commentators I before mentioned, has remarked upon that Passage in this Chapter, where we read the Husbandman's Servants came to him, and told him, that Tares were grown among his Wheat, and asked him, if they

they ſhould go and weed them out; that it is a plain Indication, how much Matter of Concern it muſt be to good and well-meaning Perſons, when they ſee Hypocrites and evil Men in the Church; that it would force them to wiſh that they could all be caſt out, and that the Church might conſiſt only of ſincere Members. But then he alſo adds, upon the Words of my Text, by this we are to underſtand, God has not made Proviſion to have all Sorts of Evil Men caſt out of the Church, and that for this Reaſon, leſt weak and good Men ſhould ſuffer with them; neither doth he always in this World ſend publick Judgments upon the Wicked, leſt the Innocent be involved in the Calamity together: But at the End of the World, he will, by his Angels, ſeparate the good and ſincere Men from the Wicked and the Hypocrites; and then he will exactly reward the one, and puniſh the other.

Wherefore Hereſies ſhould be permitted, or why not by an all-ruling Providence ſilenced before they become ſenſibly detrimental to the Church, has been a Queſtion long aſked, and puzzled many; but

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but Human Reason has not altogether been at a Loss to give some Reply to it, and Divine Revelation has not been wanting to back and support it.

Reason will tell us, whenever Objections are made against the Truth of any Doctrine, Enquiry will necessarily be incited; upon which Account, the more agreeable it is found to correspond with and answer thereunto, the stronger it engages the candid Enquirer on its Side, and not only makes him and his Readers better Defendants, but at the same Time more strenuous and earnest, undeniable and irresistable Advocates, in its Cause. And may we not say of our Church, or Religion, the more it is objected against, the more it will be examined; the more it is examined, the better it will be understood; the better it is understood, the more chearfully it will be espoused, and, consequently, the more cordially be reverenced and obeyed?

But in Allusion to this Parabolical Manner of our Saviour's expressing himself, (to which I have all along had an Eye) was the Ground providentially ordered to bring forth Seed spontaneously

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and without any Mixture of Tares, who would not easily discover that the Indolence and Slothfulness of the Labourers, would thereby be encouraged? And in like Manner, were Heresies and Schisms to be prohibited by a Divine Interdict, who would not say the Christian's Readiness to defend, as well as Constancy to practice his Duty, would also be equally abated? I will not say but the Writings of many great wicked Apostates have been of considerable Prejudice to Religion, and corrupted and perverted many; but then, I very believe, the sound and irrefragable Answers which they have provoked the Orthodox to return, have convinced and confirmed, satisfied and established more.

Scripture affords another Reason why Heresies and Hereticks, are permitted in the Church; namely, *That the Lord thereby might prove the Sincerity of his Servants.* In *Deuteronomy* we read, *If there arise among you a Prophet, or a Dreamer of Dreams, and giveth thee a Sign or a Wonder, and the Sign or the Wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, let us go after other Gods (which thou hast not known) and let us serve them; thou shalt not hearken*

unto

SERM. XV.

unto the Words of that Prophet. Now by that Allegorical Expreſſion of going after other Gods, we are to underſtand it as a Prohibition againſt embracing or admitting any Novel Doctrines contrary to thoſe already received and enjoined by the Church; for the Heathens could pay no greater Adoration to their ſtrange Gods, than Hereticks do to their Ringleaders Opinions; therefore, the Alluſion holds good: And let us ſerve other Gods; that is, let us follow after and believe foreign Errors which we have not known: But what immediately enſues? Thou ſhalt not hearken unto that Prophet. Will it not be aſked, if God permits ſuch a one to teach, why is he not to be heard? The Reaſon is nigh at Hand; becauſe the Lord your God proveth you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your Heart and with all your Soul.

Hence it is manifeſt, why the Almighty ſuffers falſe Teachers as well as falſe Prophets, the one to ſeduce, and the other to deceive, *viz.* that he may thereby prove and know us. And, truly, when great and good Men give into Error

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and Novelty, as that has frequently happened, then is the Trial ſo much the more difficultly to be withſtood.

When one for whom any Perſon has long had a Veneration and Eſteem, looking upon him as an Aſſertor and Teacher of the Truth, finally warps aſide, and broaches falſe Doctrine, it will be no eaſy Matter for that Perſon to reſiſt his Perſuaſions, or be deaf to his Solicitations. Affection will rather incline him to miſtruſt his own Judgment, than to ſuſpect his Friend's Veracity; and ſometimes it may ſo fall out, that his Heterodoxy may be introduced with Subtelty and Arguments not to be confuted by common, unthinking People, eſpecially thoſe influenced by a Perſuaſion of his former Sincerity and ſuperior Judgment; or that they may conclude it abſolutely rebellious to diſpute his Authority, to whom they have been inſtructed Submiſſion is due. Since, then, Reaſon tells us, and Revelation confirms it, that Hereſies ſhall be ſpread, yet let us, in Conformity to our excellent Rubrick, conſtantly and devoutly pray, that the Church, if not entirely freed, may al-

SERM. XV. ways be preserved from false Apostles, and ordered and guided by faithful and true Pastors, through *Jesus Christ* our Lord. *Amen.*

St. MARY's,
Oxon.

SERMON

SERMON XVI.

Pride and Ambition rebuked.

LUKE XIV. 11.

For whosoever exalteth himself, shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself, shall be exalted.

OUR Blessed Saviour ever took the most gentle, tender, affectionate, and, at the same Time, effectual Methods, to discourage and discountenance Vice, and to propagate and recommend Virtue in his Discourses and Conversation with the Sons of Men. His Eye was no quicker in discerning and discovering their Follies and Vanities, than his Tongue was powerful and persuasive in removing them; and the Manner in which he did it was such, as could neither

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give the Party levelled at, any Offence, or any of the Audience Room to insult. Personal Reflections, he knew, only serve to exasperate, and, therefore, avoided them; and it is not easily determinable, whether more Divine Power manifested itself in his Healing the Diseases and Infirmities of the Bodies of Men, or Divine Goodness in curing those of their Souls.

It is surprizing, that so much Good-nature should have had so few Followers, and much more, that so much Meekness should have had so many Opposers. One would naturally have concluded, that he that spoke, as they themselves could not but testify, so as never Man spoke, should not have wanted any of the former; and he that never refused the Expence of a Miracle, whenever a necessitous Object presented itself before him, should never have met with any of the latter: But they were Proof not only against the Eloquence, but the Power of God.

In this Chapter, from whence the Words of my Text are transcribed, you may observe, our Saviour had remarked

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the excessive Pride of the *Pharisees*, and there takes an Opportunity, by the Comparison of Guests placing themselves at a Feast, to warn his Hearers of that great Evil, and to recommend to them the excellent Virtue of Humility, without directly taxing or accusing them. He chose to do it in a Parabolical Way, as the least likely to give Offence, and so mingles Entertainment and Instruction together.

Had he immediately ridiculed or exposed them upon the Account of their predominant Vice, it might sooner have raised their Resentment, than worked their Reformation, and, probably, rather have encouraged, than checked it in others, because, unattacked by him for it: But thus universally condemning without singularly reproving it, he forbids it in general, and evades the Necessity of censuring it in particular. So excellent an Example has he set us to correct Sin, and conceal the Sinner, and to suppress Immorality, without discovering the Transgressor.

I might instance this in many Particulars, and, I hope, you are not altogether

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gether so unacquainted with the Scriptures, as to be insensible of it; wherefore, I shall at present content myself with making a Remark upon his Method of extirpating this Evil, notoriously predominant among the *Pharisees*, Pride, and that chiefly from the Parable he thought proper himself to make Use of, in order to damp and discourage it.

And, first, then, when thou art bidden of any Man to a Wedding, says he, *Sit not down in the highest Room, lest a more honourable Man than thou be bidden of him.* What a beautiful and prevalent Caution was this against that general and prevailing Thirst after Place among the *Pharisees*, pointing at none singly, yet correcting them all. And though this was primarily intended as an Admonition to them only, yet may it serve as a good Piece of Advice to all Men in general. The same Reason that would make it prudent in them to follow this Instruction, will ever continue; for Pride will render the Christian no less contemptible, than the *Pharisee*; and, therefore, is he equally concerned to avoid it. None of them, I say, could conclude he pointed particularly

particularly at him, because they, or any of them, might be invited where a more honourable Man was bidden; and, I think, he could not paint out the Disgrace that must light upon an assuming aspiring Person, in a more lively and affecting Manner, than by drawing it after that, which an intruding Guest must suffer publickly to give Place, and at the Instance, too, of the Master of the Feast.

What can be imagined more gauling, more insufferable, to an haughty proud Spirit, than to be commanded from the Seat of Honour it had Ambition enough to step into? Yet gauling and insufferable as it is, this, he hereby assures them, their unrestrained Pride constantly exposed them to. This ambitious Pride is for the most Part of such an aspiring Nature, that if it can tempt the Person to step as far as it will flatter him, he may; it generally disgraces him, by seducing him further than he should.

Nothing could be advanced more efficacious to put a Check upon this Disposition, and curb this Vice, than this short, easy, and familiar Parable; for, as

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on the one Hand, it plainly discovers the Shame and Dishonour, it unavoidably, at one Time or other, brings upon a Person; so on the other does it evidently shew the Esteem and Respect, that are ever the Reward of the opposite Virtue, Modesty or Humility.

But, for once, let us suppose this Person enjoying the Place his Ambition led him to, without Molestation, and that is granting more than can well be required; yet, when a more honourable Man did come, he could not expect his superior Seat should entitle him to his Superior's Respect: No! Honour shifts Place with Disgrace, when Pride or Presumption usurps the Seat of it.

It would be a difficult Matter to determine, whether would be the greater Disgrace, to be openly removed and degraded, and thereby, at once, undergo the Shame of an impertinent Presumption; or to be permitted to sit unregarded, and be made the lasting Scorn and Contempt of those, who know better how to despise Vanity, than to be envious at the mistaken Approach to Dignity.

No

No one ever cuts a more ridiculous Figure, than that Perſon, who either attempts upon a Place, to which he has no other Title but his Impudence; or aſſumes a Character, his Aſſurance only will expoſe him in the Acting. By this he certainly calls in Queſtion a Meanneſs that otherwiſe might never have been diſputed; and as ſurely diſcovers an Awkwardneſs that might as well have been concealed.

Places of Honour are a Foil to Merit; but when Unworthineſs vaults in, it only thereby becomes more unworthy. Something great, ſomething noble, ſomething uncommon, is naturally expected from thoſe in higher Stations, and they, when a becoming Greatneſs fills them, add to it by Reflection. But if Meanneſs, Inability, or Indignity, joined with an aſſuming Haughtineſs, reign there, they only contribute to ſignalize what a lower Station would either have rendered unobſervable, or leſs conſpicuous, and make the Wretch contemptible, even in the Seat of Honour.

This Parable, though it ſeems more immediately to allude only to Perſons

and

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and Actions in the lower Class, may also be applied to greater and higher, those in the first Rank, or of the weightiest Concern; for the Conclusion manifestly declares, that whosoever carries himself proudly and haughtily, with an unreasonable or an unjust Assuming to himself, and an arrogant Contempt of others, forgetting either his Dependance on God, or his Duty to Men, shall certainly, by the just Providence, be brought down and humbled.

Let us now then pass on to the other Part of this Parable contained in the tenth Verse: *But when thou art bidden, Go, and sit down in the lowest Room, that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: Then shalt thou have Worship in the Presence of them that sit at Meat with thee.* How is it possible to conceive the Virtue of Modesty or Humility, should be more strongly recommended?

Here is the same Art, the same Skill in painting out the Honour and Respect that will assuredly reflect upon Humility, as was used in illustrating the Disgrace that falls upon Pride.

How

How muſt it heighten and engage the Eſteem and Reverence of a Company, to behold the Maſter of the Feaſt complimenting a Perſon with the chief Seat of Diſtinction, whoſe Modeſty and Humility had ſtopped at the loweſt? Their inward Applauſe of his real Condeſcenſion, would only be equalled by their outward Regard to his concealed Superiority. His firſt taking Precedence, ſuppoſing it his Right, would not have gained him half the Reſpect, nor would it have been in the Power of the Maſter of the Feaſt, however deſirous of it, by any other particular Diſtinction, to have procured him half the Veneration. His thus diſguiſing his Quality, would only ſerve after to make it more remarkable and remembered, and his ſuffering the good Man of the Houſe to diſcover, what in him to have diſcovered, would only have made regardleſs, rendered both obſervable and permanent.

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That unaffected Sign of his Modeſty, would fix a long and a laſting Mark upon his Nobility; and his being eaſy to conceal, what no one elſe may reaſonably be preſumed to be acquainted with, except

SERM. XVI. except him who afterwards made the Discovery by his Distinction, caused him to be admired, or, as the Text has it, *Worshipped in the Presence of those with whom otherwise he might have sat down unreverenced.*

This is what easily may be inferred from this brief Relation to which I have all along confined myself; and it is a true and lively Representation of that singular Esteem and Respect, Humility, in a general Way, at least, by the distinguishing and knowing Part, is treated with.

Whether the modest Person is known either to have Priority by Birth to advance, or Superiority of Fortune to distinguish him or not; yet he has always that Something interesting in his Favour, and engaging on his Side, that will recommend him stronger to the Approbation and Affection of the more worthy and discerning, than either of those singly, or both, unattended with the former.

The Reason is common and obvious, Merit and Modesty are the truest and most inseparable Companions; and Ignorance has no other Advocate for Pre-

eminence

eminence, to which it is e[illegible]ring, but Impudence.

Besides, Humility is not only the most likely to insinuate itself into the Good-will and Opinion of the better, if not more numerous, Part of the World, but likewise to gain the Applause of Heaven: For, we may be assured, that he who is not unwilling to own a Superiority among Men, will never be backward to confess his Dependance upon God: And so far is he from denying or disallowing the former, that we may say of him in that Respect, *Like Charity he seeketh not his own.* Humility may, and often has Honour and Respect conferred upon and shewn her; but she never seizes the one, or demands the other; but, on the contrary, sometimes, indeed, this is forcibly conferred, and that reluctantly received. If ever she meets with Neglect or Contempt, as we cannot truly say she never does, yet this we may venture to affirm, it is only from those who have neither Merit, or any one good Quality, to recommend themselves, and, therefore, are either blind to discern, or too haughty to own them in others, and whose Notice

and

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But, secondly, as we have considered the proud, haughty, and aspiring Person in the highest Seat, the Place he was sure to aim at, and shewn the ridiculous and contemptible Figure he made there; let us now pursue the same Method, and consider the humble, modest, and courteous one, in the lowest, and examine the Contrast.

In the first Place, then, I shall observe to you, it would be no Uneasiness to him, and he would be no Disgrace to it: The Company could not envy him his Seat, nor would he covet theirs; and if he wanted the ceremonial Deference, he would make sure of inward Esteem.

He would manifest, what it would be better for many exalted ones could they do, that it was not Eminency or Superiority of Place, that was the only Distinction to find out the most honourable and most worthy, but that something more is requisite to be really and truly so, than only the Art or the Fortune, the Assurance or Interest to step into it.

But

But, perhaps, it may be obj[illegible] not-withstanding all this, he shall [illegible] short of obtaining that open and publick Respect, which Place and Pre-eminence would have given him, and that more bestow it there, because more are incapable to distinguish it due elsewhere! Why, I grant it: But then he is not ambitious of such popular or common Applause, and for the Lose of that, he gains what is much more desirable, and what they are no Way qualified to afford, that Peace which this World cannot give. He has the inward Complacency to know, he has the Merit, though they have not the Judgment, where to bestow, what Pride and Insufficiency have frequently the Fortune falsely to acquire, and the Calmness and Composedness also to be content and untroubled to see it no less injudiciously conferred, than foolishly and unmanly received.

These are Advantages of no small Consideration, and all these the Humble and Modest has over the Proud and Haughty: If the latter is promoted, it is only more eminently to signalize his Insufficiency, without ever being the nearer

satisfying

SERM. XVI. satisfying his insatiable Ambition. Respect can [illegible] be said, pleasing to him, because he foolishly presumes he more than deserves it, and every Act of Indifferency he construes into Contempt, for Want of Judgment to distinguish, and because there is a Consciousness, notwithstanding his Endeavours to suppress it, that tells him, he merits it. Whereas the other, if he is depressed, he shines, and in whatever Rank or Station he moves, manifests, that he borrows not Honour from it, but it from him. All Civilities he returns with a becoming and engaging Grace, and Insults he overlooks, and by a manly Contempt, avoids the Uneasiness they were intended to convey. If Favours are shewn, he knows how to be grateful, and if Promotion is conferred, he is sure to be an Ornament to it: If Frowns are cast upon him, he lowers not again, and Degradation itself cannot totally eclipse him.

Thus have I shewn you the Contrast between the Humble and the Proud; the former shining in the lowest, and the latter disgracing the highest Seat.

I will

I will now take up little more of your Time, before I dismiss you.

Let an aspiring Pride hunt after and obtain what Honours it will in an undiscerning and partial World; remember that it never can procure the secret Esteem and Reverence of understanding Men here, or the open Applause of Heaven hereafter: Neither is it always successful, however active and stirring, and that it is the least able to award and divert, and the soonest depressed and cast down at a Disappointment. It is sure to expose a Person to many Insults, and he must be possessed of some other no less worthless Qualities, to be enabled to bear them before he arrives at his Intentions, if ever he can fix them. It is void of Love and Affection, for it thinks none worthy its Esteem; it is void of Pity and Compassion, for it holds not the Afflicted deserving of its Notice; it is destitute of Charity, for it looks upon all only as its Vassals; and as it is thus averse to all obligatory Duties to Man, we may venture to say it is uneasy under its Dependance upon God.

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But Humility, in the first Place, remember, has a Blessing annexed to it; and whether it meets with Place or Promotion, it wants not the Good-will, and Good-wishes too, of all those whom a good Man would desire; and what is not altogether less desirable, it is seldom far from Content. Disappointments carry but small Disturbances to it, because it expects them; and even Success will not over elate, because it is sensible how precarious it is. It is susceptible of Love and Affection, for it deems no one unworthy its Esteem; it is full of Pity and Compassion, for the Afflicted are Objects it cannot but relieve; it is productive of Charity, for it esteems all Mankind its Brothers; and as it is thus abounding in all the Duties its near Relation to Man has laid it under, we may reasonably expect it will not be barren in those relating to God. God, therefore, grant us this Humility in Earth, that we may at least meet with Exaltation in Heaven. *Amen.*

FINIS.